

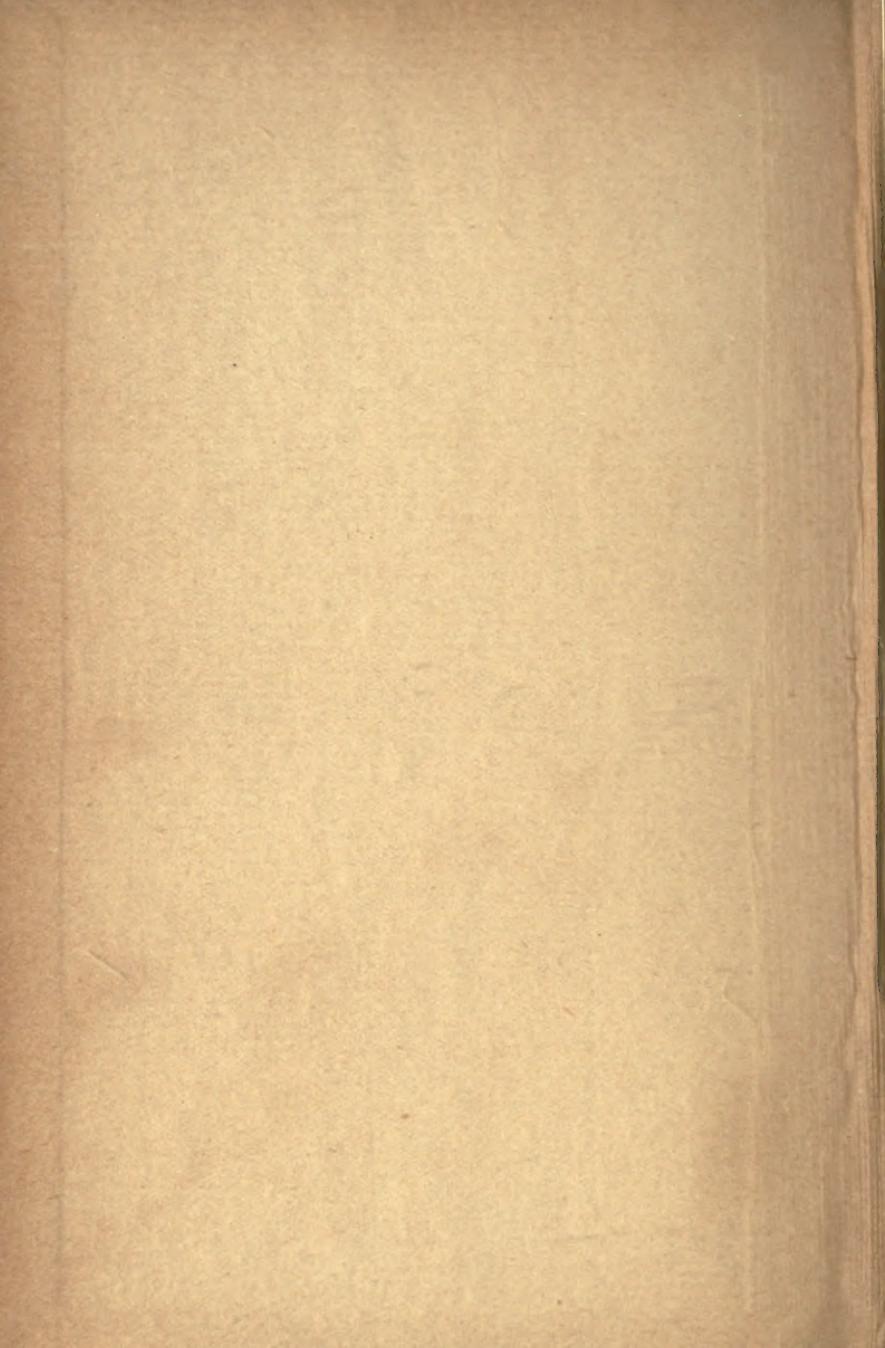


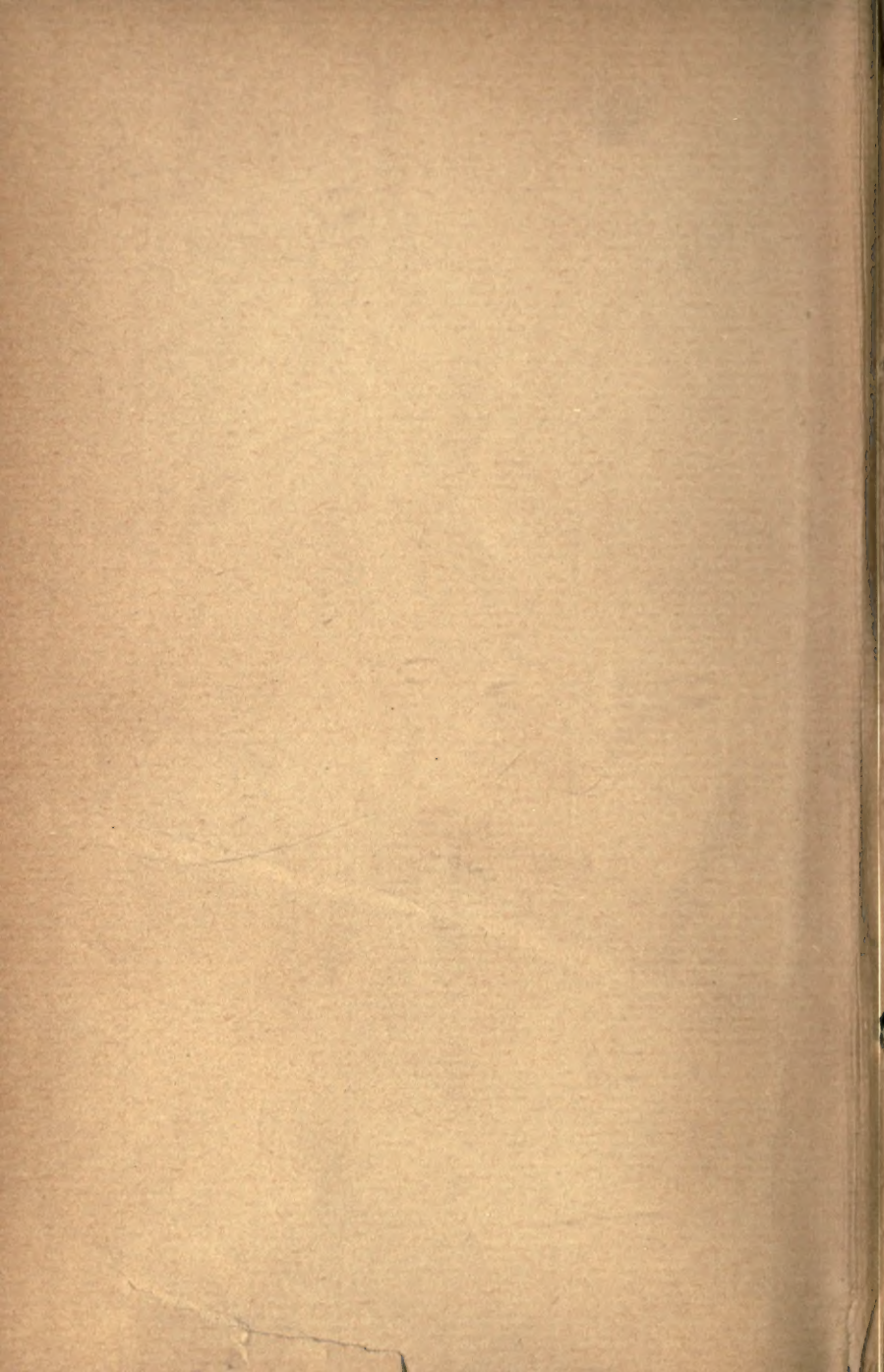
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AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

T. E. KEBBEL.







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THE
AGRICULTURAL LABOURER

A SUMMARY OF HIS POSITION

BY
T. E. KEBBEL

*FOURTH EDITION—ABRIDGED
WITH A NEW PREFACE*



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PREFACE

THE first edition of this little book, published in 1870, was founded first on the Report of the Royal Commission appointed in 1867 "to enquire into the employment of women and children in agriculture"; and secondly, on the Report of the Enclosure Commissioners, 1869. It is obvious that such an enquiry would naturally extend to the condition of the agricultural labourer in general: and it is this wider ground which my own volume was intended to cover. It has been necessary from time to time to bring it down to date, and a second edition was published in 1887, soon after the appearance of the Report of the Duke of Richmond's Commission, 1879-81. In introducing this second edition, I wrote: "Within the last seventeen years so many things have happened affecting the condition of the agricultural labourer that a volume written as long ago as 1870 might naturally be expected to contain little that was either useful or interesting. Life, however, even at the end of the nineteenth century, moves slowly in an English village; and 'though much is taken, much remains' of the old habits and customs with which I was familiar in my youth. The Education Act of 1870, the agricultural depression, the gradual

but steady decline in the numbers of the peasantry in only too many of our English villages; two Agricultural Holdings Acts; the prominence assumed among the questions of the day by the demand for allotments and small holdings, and the attention bestowed upon them by some of the leading land-owners of the country; last, but not least, the extension of the county franchise, and the endowment of the labourers with the consciousness of political power, have effected a change in the moral tone of the English peasantry, while other circumstances have added greatly to their material comfort. Yet, in much that concerns them very closely, the Reports of the Duke of Richmond's Commissioners (1879-81) but echo the words of the Commission of 1867."

Another edition appeared six years afterwards, in 1893, when I wrote: "After an interval of six years, it is only to be expected that some slight changes should have occurred in the position of the labourer, considering the transitional period through which he is now passing. His wages, perhaps, may have sunk a little below the point at which they stood in 1887, but if so, the difference is very slight. In all other material respects I believe the condition of the whole class to be as faithfully reflected in the following pages as when they were first written." And now again, in 1906, I may say as regards good wages and material comfort in general that what was written thirteen years ago

is but slightly affected by anything which has occurred during the interval. What changes there are all tell in favour of the labourer. Wages again are higher, and necessaries are no dearer. Such facts as bear out these assertions will be found either in the new table of wages which have been added to the former ones, or in the notes and appendices referring to the different chapters.

All my information, I must repeat, is original: derived, that is, from personal correspondence with landlords, farmers, clergymen, and, in one or two instances, day labourers, in twenty-seven English counties which may fairly be considered representative counties. The Poor Law Commissioners of 1834 took the answers which they had received from seven representative counties as giving a fair average of the whole country. I think my own selection is at least equally entitled to the same assumption, and now I may repeat once more that a great deal of the information afforded by it is fresh from the mint, and has been given me within the last six months.

As the publishers wished for an abridged edition, much has been omitted in this volume which filled a prominent place in the last. But the Tables of Wages and perquisites now given are fuller and more complete than those which appeared thirteen years ago—the three last are entirely new, and for the rest I have condensed what I said then within a much narrower compass, while still endeavouring to make

sufficiently clear the main positions advanced as well in the first edition as in those which followed.

As I could not undertake to rewrite the whole book, much will be found in it relating to agrarian conditions which no longer exist, or within the last thirty years have been greatly modified. The character as well as the industry of the agricultural labourer has undergone a change. But I hope that even such parts of the book as are now out of date may nevertheless possess some historical interest, and help to dissipate the remains of some popular prejudices which still linger among us.

T. E. K.

December 5, 1906.

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CHAPTER I

TABLES OF WAGES

1870, 1887, 1893—with changes in 1906

"The Reports of the Agricultural Commissioners are ably summarised in Mr. Keibel's book. After the flood of literature called forth by recent events, it still contains the best general survey, in a small compass, which has yet appeared."--*Edinburgh Review*, 1875.

"An excellent little book."—Mr. CLARE SEWELL READ, *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, April, 1887.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coal, and Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s to 14s with cow kept. House and garden rent free.* Coals led: 1,000 yards potatoedrill: sometimes seed found.		None.	None.	22s to 24s	Up country, when paid with stock, they have a few bolls of Corn, and keep of fifteen to eighty sheep, and two cows.
Carter ...	15s to 16s, with house and garden; coals led. 1,000 yards potato drill; engaged for one year; if by the day, 2s 6d to 3s, and for harvest, 4s.		...	None.	20s to 21s	This is in all cases from May-day, for one year, and employer takes risk of health; full wages paid, except in case of death.
Day Labourer }						
Women ...	1s 3d in Winter. 1s 6d in Summer. 3s for twenty days in harvest.		...	...	...	For each house one woman worker is found at this wage, and must have work or be paid, except in bad weather.
Boys...	8d to 2s per day.			..	...	Scarcely any piecework in any part of this county.

* Average value in Northumberland, £4 0s 11d. Government Return, p. 20, 1887.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

	By Week.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coal, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s to 14s, with cow kept; house and garden rent free; coals carted. 1,000 yards potatoes planted, & some-times seed found.	None	None.	22s to 24s	In the hill country shepherds have sometimes sheep and two cows kept, and a few bolls of corn instead of wages in money.
Carter ...	15s to 16s, with house and garden; coals carted. 1,000 yards potatoes; engaged for year.	...	None.	...	If by the day, 2s 6d to 3s, and for harvest, 4s. When engaged by the year, full wages in case of illness.
Day Labourer ...	1s 3d to 1s 6d Summer day; 3s for twenty days in harvest.	...	None.	...	For each cottage on farm, one woman worker is found by occupier, and must have work or be paid, except in bad weather.
Women ...					
Boys ...	8d to 2s a day ...	...	None.	...	Little or no piecework done by regular agricultural (farm) servants in this county.

Sir Mathew Ridley himself on his own farm pays 16s a week, besides the above perquisites. All are hired from May-day to May-day, and paid alike both in sickness and health.

From Kirkby Stephen, in Westmoreland, I have received the enclosed. There wages are now much what they were in 1870, a slight rise having occurred in the interval owing to there being work.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Coal.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	12s to 13s, with house-rent free†		Wheat harvest makes no difference here.	Cow kept for him.	£1 1s on average	
Carter ...	12s		Hay harvest men get £5 to £8 per month, with beer and food.	Keep.		Or more frequently lives with master, and gets £14 or £15 for the half year, sometimes rather more. Hiring half-yearly.
Day Labourer	15s		...	With keep.		Labourer hired by day, so depends on weather.
Women ...	1s 6d		...	Keep.		
Boys ...	£3 to £5 half-year.		...	Keep.		

* For 1906, see Appendix I. and II.

† Average rent in Westmoreland, £4 10s 5d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—JANUARY, 1885, TO JANUARY, 1886.

Keeping down the West side of England we come to Cheshire.

	By Week.	By Piecework.	By Harvest Money.	By Perquisites, Beer, Coal, and Faggots.	Remarks.
Shepherd				The agricultural labourers as a rule live in the farm house, and get £18 or £20 a year.
Carter ...	10s a week and victuals.				
Day Labourer ...	10s a week and victuals.		3d to 4d an hour is sometimes paid for overtime during the harvests, but not very often.	8d to 1s a day allowed for beer, but as a rule about two quarts of beer is allowed, and not beer money.	
Women ...	6s a week and victuals.				
Boys...	From 3s a week upwards and victuals.				

1006. — Labourers live in farm house. Men get £18 or £20 a year, with board and lodgings—boys from 2s 6d to 5s.

The next county on my list is North Shropshire, where my informant says that wages have fallen down two shillings a week since 1880, the present rate being:—

Ordinary labourers	...	12s to 14s a week ; piecework, £4.
Shepherds	} ...	14s to 15s, with cottage free * ; piecework, £4 = £4 9s 1d.
Carters		
Stockmen		
Boys	...	£6 to £10 per annum, with board and lodging in harvest.

On threshing days beer and dinner are given, or extra money instead. All alike can earn at piecework, including harvest, some £4 a year above their ordinary wages, which would give the day-labourer, without earnings of family, from £38 to £40 a year.

From Hampshire a large farmer writes:—"Arch's agitation caused us to pay higher wages, and they have never gone so low since as they were previously. We pay boys and men higher than ever to keep them on the land ; all flock into the towns." As will presently be seen, this is a general complaint. His table is not filled up quite so clearly as some others. But I have throughout printed the returns exactly as I received them, so that the farmers might tell their own tale. The Wiltshire table which follows is much more satisfactory.

* Average rent in Shropshire, £4 9s 1d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.*

HAMPSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Place.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Tail Corn, Faggots, etc.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	11s	...	£3 wages.	Cottage,† Rent free.		With £1 worth of wood and coal; on large farms more. 1d for each lamb tailed.
Carter ...	11s	...	£3.	Cottage, rent free; £1 for coal; 9d per day for beer in hay and harvest work.		6d every time out with corn for sale; beer in hay and corn harvest.
Day Labourer ...	10s	...	...	Extra for hay and corn harvest, hoeing and general piecework; the larger the farm the more they earn.		Wife at piecework in
Women ...	5s or 6s	...	Work with husband.			1s 6d per day in harvest; with 4d for beer, and piecework in harvest.
Boys ...	4s to 7s	...	...		From £2 to £5.	

* For 1906, see Appendix I., Wages.

† Average value in Hampshire. £4 10s 9d.

WILTSHIRE.

Wages

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	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of Education Act.	Remarks.
Shepherd	11s or 12s	1d or 2d each lamb weaned, amounting to about 50s.	£4 (Michaelmas money).	House and garden and potato ground, rent free. Ton of coal at Christmas and faggots; other small perquisites; small beer.	About £44		Agricultural labourer far better off than he has been before in the living memory, both as to time and severity of labour.
Carter ...	11s or 12s	...	£4 (Michaelmas).	House and garden rent free; faggots & coal; 1s or 1s 6d for load of corn taken out and sold; beer or beer money.	Do.		Young men especially will not work their best, even at piecework.
Day Labourer	10s	At least half as much as his weekly wages, in some cases more.	Included in piecework, as estimated before.		£32		Men in former days, say 20 or 30 years ago, would mow 1½ acres in a day. They will not mow 1 acre now. Farmers disheartened by the comparatively poor quality of the labour, and think it much too highly paid in comparison with the results.
Women...	4s 6d to 5s	...					
Boys ...	3s 6d to 6s	None.	£1 to £3				

* Cf. pp. 12 and 36, and Appendix I.

† Average value in Wiltshire, £3 15s 8d.

I subjoin an extract from a letter from a Wiltshire clergyman whom I have known for five-and-twenty years as a strong Liberal, and who has always sympathised with the labourers:—

“It is even harder to get these facts from labourers than from farmers. If you were to ask my gardener what he got a week you would find him fence with the question, or probably leave you under a wrong impression. The best wages are earned by those who undertake a dairy and making cheese—a man and a woman like this getting from 25s. to 30s. a week. There can be no doubt at all as to the vast improvement in the material condition of the Wiltshire farm labourer, and it is equally certain that never was he so thoroughly discontented or so averse to work—never willing to do the smallest thing to oblige his master at a pinch without extra pay. We had a fire here lately, and the first question the men asked was what they were to get for their additional work—several would not do a stroke of work hardly, and looked on with their hands in their pockets. Things were very different—much better—years ago. Compulsory education has worked badly—here the compulsion practically is dropped.”

Making a detour into the cider counties we get the following statements from Somersetshire, Worcester Herefordshire, and Gloucestershire:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.*
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	14s	Nil.	20s a week for about five weeks.	9 gallons of ale at lambing time; 2 quarts of cider a day; $\frac{1}{2}$ ton coals.	16s 7d a week.	Besides his set and garden 2s a week, equivalent to 1s a wk. perquisite. Ditto.
Carter	14s	Nil.	25s	2 quarts of cider a day in winter, 3 in summer. Occasionally an extra shilling if out late or early. House and garden at 2s a week, worth 3s.	16s 5d a week.	
Day Labourer†...	11s	11s to 15s	About 18s	2 quarts of cider from March to October; none in winter. An extra pint sometimes in hay-time or harvest.	13s a week.	...
Women	5s	...	...	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ pints of cider at hay-making.	...	...
Boys	11s 10s 7s 5s	Under carter.	15s 12s 6d	All get cider	Average. 12s 0d 11s 6d 8s 0d 6s 0d	All big enough to plough and manage a pair of horses.

* For 1906, see Appendix I., Wages.

† Average value in Gloucestershire, £4 10s 8d. But in many parts of Gloucestershire the cottage gardens are exceptionally large, and the two together would be worth 3s a week.

‡ But the labourer dislikes piecework now. See Sewell Read, Appendix I., Wages.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

HEREFORDSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coals, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	12s	...	15s	{ 2s 2s }	16s	Exclusive of cottage* and sundry perquisites.
Carter ...	12s	...	15s	4s	16s	Do. do.
Day Labourer...	10s	...	12s 6d	...	...	May have cottage in addi- tion, but few perquisites.
Women ...	4s 6d for regular, and		for casual 1s a day.			
Boys ...	3s to 5s according to age and capability.				...	
Informant tells me that far too little account is taken by men (as a rule) of the value of their perquisites, even when looked at from a weekly wages point of view.						

* Average value in Herefordshire, £5 1s 7d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

WORCESTERSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Coal.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	15s	For lambing, £1.	£2	£2	£ s. d. 44 0 0	
Carter ...	15s	...	£2		43 0 0	
Day Labourer...	12s	...	£4	£2	37 4 0	
Women ...	6s	...	12s per week.	...	...	Only partially employed.
Boys ...	4s to 5s	...	10s	£1	14 0 0	

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

WEST KENT, NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SEVENOAKS, AND TONBRIDGE.

Returning to the South Coast, I have the two following tables from Kent, one from West Kent kindly supplied to me by Lord Stanhope. Here it will be seen that almost everthing is paid in hard cash.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tall Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shapherd ...	20s	...	...	From 20s to 40s extra for extra attention in lambing season.	About £54	
Carter ...	18s, including Sunday attendance on horses.	...	...	Beer in harvest, with perhaps 15s	About £47 10s	
Day Labourer	15s	...	...	None.	£39	Farmers have lately rather lowered wages in the district.
Women ...	7s 6d	...	...	...	...	Women and children go out hopping, in August, from the district villages.
Boys ...	7s	...	...	...	...

Allotments, general, in neighbourhood; from 20 to 30 perches; at 3d to 4d a perch; let by the landlord directly.

The East Kent wages appear to be somewhat lower.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

SOUTH-WEST KENT.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Coals, Beer.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	16s	...	...	Rent and Fuel, £5	Annual, £40 12s	
Carter ...	16s	...	...	£5	Do.	Annually.
Day Labourer...	12s	2s 6d	5s	...	About £36	These earn, say, half the year, 2s 6d per week over their day wages.
Women ...	1s	...	...	...	...	Women earn, say, 2s per week (say £5 4s per year) hop-tying and picking hops.
Boys ...	8d to 1s	

AGRICULTURAL WAGES, DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.
SUSSEX.

Wages

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	By the Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Effect of the Education Act.	Remarks.
Shepherd.	1s	Nothing.	Nothing.	*House; keep him a cow; keeps what poultry he likes; half the geese; all the fat in dead sheep; keep him a horse to ride.			This man has sole charge of 350 acres, all grass, and grazed, has a boy to help him at 9s a week. Shearing done by men who take the job.
Carter No. 1, and his boy	16s	} Nothing.	Nothing.	Nothing.			These men's wages were all 2s per week more before last Michaelmas. The boys' or mates', so here called, have not lowered.
No. 2	7s		Do.	Do.			
No. 3	14s		Do.	Do.			
No. 4	14s		Do.	Do.			
Day Labourers.	per day.	This includes harvest.					The day labourers were lowered 3d per day at Michaelmas, 1885, when wages were 2s 6d per day, and at Michaelmas, 1886, per day 3d again lower, were in proportion. Stockmen lowered 2s per week.
Best man, 1	2s	£17					
do. 2	2s	£19 3s					
do. 3	2s	£12 15s					
do. 4	2s	£14 18s					
do. 5	1s 9d	£15 10s					
do. 6	1s 6d	£5 2s					

* Average rent of cottage in Sussex, £5 6s 3d.

If now we turn northwards again, and cross the River Thames, we shall find that in the three typical East Anglian counties, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, the rise and fall in wages has been very marked. They rose from 10s. a week to 12s. after 1870, and have now fallen back again to 10s., minus the shilling a week for beer, which was given down to the end of last winter. The following comes from a farm some few miles north of Bishop Stortford.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.*

ESSEX.

	By Week.	By Piece	By Harvest	By Perquisites, Beer, Tail Corn, Faggots, &c.	Total	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	About 12s and house.	...	£5 to £6	...		This is, I believe, about the wages; some are allowed to keep a few sheep; I have no sheep.
Carter ...	12s	...	£6 to 18	1s instead of small or table beer.		Comes 4.30 A.M. to feed his horses; also on Sundays; other men at 6 A.M.
Horsekeeper who generally ploughs from 6 till 2 P.M.						
Day Labourer						
	10s	11s to 12s	£5 to £7	1s		Now 10s, without beer—wages having been reduced 1s the last winter.
Women ...	9d a day.	...	...	Gleanings 4 or 5 bushels of corn.		Not many women or girls go to field labour, and only in fine weather. In some small villages 1s to 1s 6d per week more. A large farmer living 5 or 6 miles from here told me last week he could only get one boy about twelve, at 4s per week, and had to set men leading his horses, at dung-cart, &c.
Girls 13 to 16	6d to 8d a day.	...	...	...
Boys	2s 6d to 6s or 7s	...	...	...

1900.—No material change in wages.

* See Appendix I., Wages.

The farmer who sent me the above table accompanied it with a very interesting letter on the condition of the labourers in general, the substance of which will be given hereafter. From another village in the same neighbourhood I have received the enclosed, which shows a slightly higher scale, but not much.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.*

ESSEX.

	By Week.	By Piece.	Harvest.	Perquisites, Beer, Coals, Faggots, Tail Corn, &c., &c.	Total	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	13s	Princi- pally all threshed bymach- inery.	£8 per man.	Not any.		I think wages in general are 1s per week, on the aver- age, more than in 1870.
Carter ...	13s					I think wages rose 1s per week on account of Arch and the Union. On account of the great depression in agriculture now the labourers are taking 1s per week less.
Day Labourer	11s					
Women ...	4s		2s per day.			
Boys ...	From 3s 6d to 6s					

* See Appendix I., Wages.

From South Suffolk comes the following:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DEC., 1885, TO DEC., 1886.

SOUTH SUFFOLK.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	Perquisites.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	12s	...	...	House and garden free; malt* and firing free; 6d for each lamb.	20s	And certain other advantages.
Carter ...	12s and 11s	...	£8 10 for about 1 month.	Malt free; house rent, 1s 6d.†	17s 6d and 16s 6d	Firing for heating oven for baking bread, &c.
Day Labourer	11s and 10s	Many kinds of work too numerous to specify.	£8 10	Rough firing in harvest.	17s & 16s.	
Women..	8d to 10d a day					
Boys ...	4s to 7s a week according to age.					

In the following return from the same county the reader will see that faggots figure largely among the perquisites. Cobbett remarks on the superior comforts of the peasantry in a woodland district; and wherever there is much wood-felling going on the woodcutters always get a nice lot of brushwood to carry home. Here, too, they are allowed firewood when fencing; that is, hedging. The reader must note this where he sees so much put down for piecework, it

* The Suffolk labourers brew at home.

† The cottages and gardens in this part of England are particularly good. See Clifford's "Agricultural Look-out," cap. viii. He reckons cottages let at 1s 6d as well worth 3s 6d. But the average rent is only £4 1s 6d.

means that for so many weeks out of the fifty-two the man receives this extra amount. Piecework, *i.e.*, turnip hoeing, pulling, draining, and hedging, varies very greatly in different districts. Here it seems to be worth about 4s. a week extra for eleven weeks in the year. This table is drawn up for 1885, and 1s. a week must be deducted from weekly wages for 1886.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—JAN., 1885, TO JAN., 1886.*

NORTH SUFFOLK.

	By Week.	By Piece.	Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total.
Shepherd ...	13s	6d a head for rearing 293 lambs, £7 6s 6d. Clipping, 33s	£ s. d. 2 0 0	Cottage† rent free and faggots.	£ s. d. 44 15 6
Carter ...	13s	Hay sell, 10s.	7 5 0	Rent free & faggots.	38 19 0
Day Labourer	11s	Do. & hoeing. About 15s from 10 to 12 weeks.	7 5 0	Obtain faggots by fencing.	35 13 0
Women ...	Not much employed in this neighbourhood; or 10d a day	employed in this neighbourhood; when weeding, &c., 9d a day; picking stones, 1d per bushel.			
Boys ...	From 2s 6d to 7s or 8s	In proportion to men.			

* A slighter but appreciable rise in wages. See Appendix I., Wages.

† Average rent, £4 1s 6d.

The following account has been sent to me in a letter by an eminent agriculturist in Norfolk :—

“ Our carters are generally paid from 2s. to 2s 6d. a week above day labourers. Sometimes a cottage, rent free, and less wages; all take their share in harvest, which may range from £6 to £8. The time is usually under a month, sometimes less than three weeks. Shepherds have the usual pay of stockmen, whose Sundays are employed; that is, 1s. or 1s. 6d. above day labourers, and 6d. a head for all lambs weaned. Day labourers are paid from 10s. to 12s. a week. They have extra harvest wages and extra pay in hay-time, with piecework all through the summer. At turnip-hoeing a man should always earn half-a-crown a day, and task work is generally put out so that he may be able to earn that sum.

“ Wages rose with the leaps and bounds of our prosperity among the agricultural labourers, and were no doubt also put up by the Union and the strikes. They had been as high as 12s. previously, but the Agricultural Union could not keep up wages when agricultural distress set in.”

With a few more figures from the Midland Counties our inquiry into the existing rate of wages may be brought to a conclusion. I may take this opportunity of pointing out that wherever it is stated that wages have fallen a shilling during the past winter we must remember that they will not remain at that level all through the current year, and that many of the tables which I have given represent only the sums paid during the three or four darkest and least busy months in the whole calendar.

From North Northamptonshire, Mr. Albert Pell, of Haslebeach, late M.P. for South Leicestershire, sends me the following statement of the rate of wages in his own district. He says that skilled labour has not fallen at all in the last five years, and is now perhaps rising, but that common unskilled labour is lower than it was.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Coal, Faggots.	Total for the Year.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	20s	...	...	Beer, house, 30s £4*	£57 10s	Rate of wages keeps up.
Carter ...	18s	..	...	load money, 20s 10s	£48 6s	Do. perhaps rises.
Day Labourer...	13s	22 weeks, 16s	4 weeks, 26s	haytime, 15s	£40 15s	Weekly wages lower now by about 1s.
Women ...	7s 6d	...	...	...	...	Hardly any women em- ployed now.
Boys ...	6s	...	12s	10s	£17 6s	Wages rising.

1906.—The rise in wages here has been at about the same rate, that is from one to two shillings a week. Boys not to be got.
Average rent in Northamptonshire, £4 13s 11d.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

Employment.	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.
Shepherd ...	16s and house and allotment 30 poles.	Shearing. 2s per score in addition to weekly wages.	£1	1d for each single lamb. 3d for each pair raised.
Carter ...	17s per week.	...	About £3	
Yardman *	16s per week.	...	About £2 10s	
Day Labourer ...	14s per week.	Varying sums.	About £2 10s	
Women ...	Very few employed 1s 6d per day	on land in this neighbourhood when employed.		
Boys ...	From 3s to 10s according to age.	...	Double wages for 4 weeks.	

In 1886 the sum total of the day labourer's earnings is given at about £39, and they have just fallen by about 1s a week. In 1906 it is about £40 12s.

1906. — Here again the difference is not substantial, only we observe that skilled labour now commands a higher price because of its scarcity.

My 1906 account is much fuller, but there is no very great difference in results—it comes from a well-known land agent in Northamptonshire. See Appendix I., *Wages*.
* It is in this return alone that the "yardman" figures.

From central Oxfordshire I have been supplied with the following table:—

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.*

CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tall Corn, Coal, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	£36 8s 6d 14s per week.	£5 in the year; shearing at 4s a score—can do a score a day	£5 10s extra.	Cottage and garden.†	£46 18s 6d in the year.	Cowmen 13s per week, with cottage and garden; also extras for piece- work, hay- time, and harvest.
Carter ...	£35 10s 6d 13s per week.	£7 in the year; manure cart filling, &c., at about 2s 6d per day.	£5 2s 6d extra.	Cottage; £1 for beer in harvest; 8d per day extra in haytime.	£47 13s	
Day Labourer	£31 1s 11d 11s per week.	£6 14s 6d in the year; at about 2s 6d a day.	£2 5s 6d extra.	...	£40 1s 3d	
Women ...	...	...	...	...	...	I never employ women, they gossip so.
Boys ...	£13 10s 5s a week.	...	Extra 10s 6d at 7s 6d a wk.	...	£14 in the year.	

* See Appendix I., Wages.

† Average rent, £3 19s 6d.

Mr. Jonathan Glover, of Kilby Lodge, agent to Sir Henry Halford, of Wistow Hall, Leicestershire, and President of the Leicestershire Chamber of Agriculture, is my next informant.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.*
LEICESTERSHIRE.

By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Tall Corn, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd 18s winter. 21s for 10 weeks in summer.	Besides shear- ing, when 30s a week is earn- ed, and lamb- ing time 20s extra for the job.	No harvest work for this man.	House and garden free = £6 a year.	£55 16s.	Reckoning the garden and cottage as worth £6 a year.
Carter ... 18s winter. 21s summer.	None.	None.	House and garden free.	About £53 16s.	
Day 14s winter. 19s summer. Labourer	The best men earn 20s a week at draining in winter, and hedge-cutting 18s a week, and in summer 24s to 30s a week harvesting, but only the best men.		Beer after 6 o'clock when carrying.	About £44 16s.	Allowing 4 weeks' draining, and 4 weeks' hedging in the 19s sum- mer wages; tur- nip hoeing by the piece is in- cluded.
Women ... Boys ...	None employed. 4s to 6s.	Get 6s. to 9s a week 1s 6d a wk. extra for 10 weeks.	at seaming hosiers. None.		

1906. — Report from Mr. Glover's successor agrees very much with Glover in total amounts. But the day labourer gets now about £46 8s. instead of £44 16s. Boys very scarce.
* See Appendix I., Wages.

The following letter will explain the above statement:—

“DEAR MR. KEBBEL,—Our year of labour is divided into two sections—ten weeks (summer wages) and forty-two weeks winter. During the former the best men get 19s. a week when not cutting harvest, which lasts, say, a month. During this month they are on by the piece; their 19s., of course, ceases, and they get from 30s. to 35s. a week during the month, which makes, say, 25s. per week average for ten weeks summer. Then, as to winter, they have 14s. a week for a week of six days (1s. extra for Sunday men). During this time the best men get three months’ piecework—draining, hedging, &c.—for which they get 18s. a week, averaging, for forty-two weeks, 15s. a week.”

I have received the accompanying statement of Lincolnshire wages from the neighbourhood of Louth, from which it will be seen how greatly wages vary in different parts of the county, for the fall since 1877 would not account for the whole difference between Mr. Little’s table and my informant’s.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

LINCOLNSHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total about	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	11s	...	For harvest, £3	House and garden,* 1s 6d; 30 stone pork at 6s, £9; 1 rood potatoes, 10s; 60 faggots, 12s.	£45 12s	Lincolnshire system of payment of yearly men is to give them in lieu of wages so many stones (14 lb.) of pork.
Carter ...	10s	...	Is able to earn by task work about £3 0s 6d.	House and garden; 30 stone bacon.	£41 18s	As a rule, in Lincolnshire, the carters, known here as wag- goners, are single men, and have so much per annum, and their board and lodgings found.
Day Labourer	12s to 13s 6d	17s 6d or 18s	Can earn for a month in har- vest about £8.	Have coals fetched for them when required.	£40 14s	The last two years the daily la- bourer has been in receipt of 2s for winter six months, and 2s 3d summer do. per day.
Women ...	None employed,	chiefly Irish,	except in gangs, from towns, and they are and earn about 1s 2d per day.			
Boys ...	3s to 8s	...	Have their wages doubled in har- vest for a month, in lieu of task work, generally.			

1906.—In Lincolnshire a slight rise. But the main difference is caused by the development of the potato industry from November to October, when a man with his wife and four or five children may make as much as £6 a week. So profitable is this juvenile labour that the parents pay the fines for non-attendance sooner than forego it.

* Average value in Lincolnshire, £4 11s 4d. See Appendix I. on Wages; II. on Labour.

From South Lincolnshire, near Stamford:—

By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Faggots, Beer, Coal, Milk, etc.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	15s	...	...	£ s. 55 18	Wages not reduced more than 1s 6d since 1878.
	General custom to give the shepherd, in addition to weekly wages of 15s, sufficient potatoes, wood for kindling for use of his household, 20 stones of bacon or its equivalent in money (for his harvest), house & garden* rent free, and a sum (usually 2d) for each lamb when taken from ewe in the autumn. Not customary to have milk found.				
Day Labourer	13s	1s 9d week (average).	...	£ s. 42 7	A most difficult question to answer as here set; some <i>skilled</i> labourers earn, on an average, 21s a week. Usually fully employed in South Lincoln, and comfortably <i>housed, fed, & looked after</i> . Very few single carters or horsemen now live in their master's house; they live with yearly men, who are married, and work on farm. Very few now employed; the class of women, far more respectable and better educated than those of 1867—field (women) labourers—are fast disappearing— <i>most proper, too</i> . A very great scarcity of boys now exists, and great outcry, at times, against the cause, viz., <i>Compulsory Education</i> . Pay very good; strong boys better paid than I remember.
Carter— Single Men	12s	From £12 weekly wages. No extras.			
Married Men	15s	Same terms as shepherd.			
Women ...	9s	18s week for one month.	1 pint beer per day in hay-time and harvest.		
Boys ...	6s to 9s	12s week for one month.	1 pint beer per day in hay-time and harvest.		

* Average rent, £4 11s 4d.

The next estimate with which I shall trouble the reader is from the neighbourhood of Stratford-on-Avon. Another, which I have received from the neighbourhood of Leamington, does not differ very materially.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coals, Milk, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd	14s	3d a head for each lamb reared; 3s 6d per score for shearing; 18s for hay-making time.	Takeshare with other men, which would amount to about £8 10s for the harvest time, at 12s an acre, more or less, according to circumstances, beer included, for cutting, carting, stacking & covering. The same as above.	No charge made, and nil.	About £52.	Cottage & plenty of potato ground free.*
Carter ...	14s	2d an acre for all corn drilled well; 3d a load for corn delivered; 6d an acre for mowing grass with machine; 18s for hay-mak'g time.	The same as above.	The same as above.		Ditto.
Day Labourer	12s	Hay-making, 18s; hoeing corn and roots by the piece, which would amount to 18s a week for 3 months.	The same as above.	The same as above.	£44 4s	
Women ..	10d per day.	Turnip cleaning by the acre; hay-making, 1s 6d per day, with a tea at 5 o'clock.	Generally do a bit by the acre, say 10s, for reaping, per acre.			
Boys ...	5s to 6s p. wk.	9s for hay-making.	Double wages for harvest.			

* Average rent of cottage and garden, £4 15s 5d. Some have both garden and potato ground.

The last I have received, at the eleventh hour, is from Cambridge, but apparently incomplete.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—DECEMBER, 1885, TO DECEMBER, 1886.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites, Beer, Faggots, Tail Corn, Coad, &c.	Total.	Remarks.
Shepherd ...	15s	No piece- work.	No harvest.	None.		This is the average wage, taking into considera- tion what the shepherd receives for lambs and shearing.
Horse-keeper Carter Stock or Yard Woman Day Labourer	13s	...	From £8 10s to £10. £8 10s.	Is a week for beer, and some- times 2s a week for cottage rent. None.		Very little piecwork is done in these parts, except in hay harvest. Very few women go in the fields hereabouts; in this parish only two or three at the most.
Women ...	6s	...	...	...
Boys ...	6s aver- age.	...	Double wages and beer.	N.B.—The above particulars refer to really good workmen only. There is a large class of men who will only take work by the job, and, rather than be in regular employment, will stand idle for a few days after earning a few shillings.		

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—1906.

YORKSHIRE.

Employment.	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.
Shepherd ...	15s	24s	25s	Cottage rent free, milk, and potato ground.
Waggoner ...	8s with board and lodgings.			
Day Labourer ...	10s			
Women ...	None.			
Boys ...	None.			

The above form is very imperfectly filled up.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—1906.

DORSETSHIRE.

Occupation.	Weekly Wage in Cash.	Extras paid in Cash for Piecwork, Harvest, etc.	Total Cash Payments in the Year.	Average Weekly Cash earned.	Value of such as Cottage and Garden, if free, Fuel, Potato Ground.		Total
Shepherd ...	13s	3s	£41 12s	16s	Cottage and garden, 2s ; fuel, 30s to 40s ; potato ground, 5s to 10s.	Say 2s 9d	18s 9d
Carter ...	12s	2s	£36 8s	14s	do.	2s 9d	16s 9d
Labourer ...	11s	2s to 4s	£33 16s to £39	13s to 15s	Cottage and garden, 1s to 1s 6d ; fuel, 10s to 20s ; potato ground, 5s.	1s 6d to 2s	14s to 17s
Cowman ...	12s	do.	do.	do.	do.	...	15s 6d to 17s
Boys ...	According to age and strength.	...	...	6s to 12s	...	...	6s to 12s

The above is taken from three different districts in Dorset, and may be said to be a fair average.

AGRICULTURAL WAGES—1906.

SOUTH-WEST WILTSHIRE.

Occupation.	Weekly Wage in Cash.	Other Earnings in Cash for Piece and Harvest, etc.	Total Earnings in Cash.	Average Wage in Cash per Week.	Value of Perquisites, Cottage and Garden, Fuel, Potato Ground, etc.		Total.
Shepherd ...	15s	3s 7d	£48 14s	18s 7d	Cottage and garden, 1s 9d to 2s; fuel, 25s; potato ground, 10s.	2s 5d	20s to 21s
Carter ...	14s	2s 9d	£43 10s	16s 9d	Cottage and garden, 1s 9d to 2s; fuel, 20s; potato ground, 10s.	2s 3d	19s
Labourer ...	12s	2s 8d to 3s 9d	...	14s 8d to 15s 9d	Cottage and garden, not free, deduct 1s 2d per week; rent charged, £3 per annum.	...	13s 6d to 14s 6d
Boys ...	4s to 12s per week, according to age and strength.	...	...	...	...	...	4s to 12s

The above is taken from a mixed farm on which I employ nearly one hundred hands.—E. H. MILES.

I value the carters' and shepherds' cottages at more than those let to labourers, as those men have as a rule the best cottages given them.

There are some of the skilled labourers who earn 17s per week, but I have given the average alone.

The three last tables—Yorkshire, Dorsetshire, and South-West Wiltshire—are now inserted for the first time.

CHAPTER II

LABOUR

"Squalent abductis arva colonis"

THE following sentence, from a letter already quoted, only strikes the key-note of the general chorus of complaint which rises up from all quarters, runs through all the Reports of the last Agricultural Commission, and is repeated with more or less emphasis by the majority of my own correspondents: "The labourer's chief aim is to obtain the greatest wage for the least possible amount of the worst possible work."¹

These are melancholy words, but I am sorry to say they are confirmed by an overwhelming weight of evidence, which leaves no room for doubt. The evil may be more pronounced in one county than in another. Of the several causes which contribute to it, one may preponderate here and another there. Discontent and ill-will towards the farmers may mingle more largely with indolence and incompetence in the eastern counties than in the western. But the result is the same all round. The fact stares us in the face, and as Mr. Druce well says, "is one of the least satisfactory features in the farmer's prospects." Skilled labour is growing more and more scarce, and the younger class of skilled labourers are growing

¹ Letter from Norfolk, March, 1887.

less and less skilful. The rising generation of the peasantry take no interest in agricultural work. In many villages the men who can cut a hedge, drain a field, or thatch a rick may be counted on the fingers of one hand, and they are old men. Many whom the farmer is obliged to employ cannot even hoe turnips. The best boys from the schools all set their faces towards the town, and scorn the plough. Those who remain get higher wages, but they neither know their work nor care to know it. They refuse, in fact, to learn it. They cannot be trusted with horses as they could be formerly. They treat them roughly or neglect them. Slowly but surely the old breed of labourers is dying out, and those who should supply their place are leaving the land. In another generation, if English arable farming is not extinguished by competition, it is likely to perish for want of men to till the soil.

Every one of my own correspondents, and every one of the Duke of Richmond's Assistant Commissioners, say the same on this point. Mr. Coleman, in his Report on Yorkshire, quotes the following evidence: At page 192: "The labourer, though much better off, is not so industrious or so clever at his work; he cannot hedge or drain, or turn his hand to any farm work as his father could, though he knows more about stock." This last, however, is a very exceptional exception. At page 198: "Work not so well done." Page 199: "Deficient in quality." Page 257—from Westmoreland: "Men receive 50 per cent. more wages, and do 30 per cent. less work than they did twenty-five years ago." From Staffordshire—page 270—Mr. Doyle reports among the causes of agricultural depression: "The inferior workmanship

of the present class of labourers." From Oxfordshire—page 273: "Less efficient labour." From Warwickshire—page 318: "Plenty of men, but quality very inferior;" "when the old men die off, we shall be quite without men able to cut a hedge properly, thatch a rick, shear a sheep, or any such work." From Gloucestershire—page 319: "Quality middling;" "quality bad;" "quantity per diem not what it was ten years ago." Shropshire—*ibid*: "Quality fast deteriorating;" "difficult to find young men who are good hedgers, stackers, or thatchers." Herefordshire—page 320: "Quality very bad." Mr. Druce reports from Buckinghamshire (Supplementary Report, page 11) that "There are few really good workmen." From Cambridge—page 17: "All my informants complain of the quality of the labour." From Hertfordshire—page 35: "The quality of the labour is not so good as formerly." From Huntingdonshire—page 42: "It takes five men now to do the work that four did formerly." From Leicestershire—page 48: "Quality of labour most indifferent, and depreciating." From Lincolnshire—page 54: "General opinion throughout the county that the labourers do not work so hard, or do their work so well as formerly." From Norfolk—page 67: "Universal complaint that the quality of the labour had deteriorated and was deteriorating." From Northamptonshire—page 73: "Labourer does less work than formerly." From Nottinghamshire—page 81: "Plenty of labour, but inferior quality." From Suffolk—page 94: "Work not done so well as it used to be." Mr. Little reports from Devonshire—page 428: "Quality of labour has much deteriorated." From Berkshire and Wiltshire—page 444: "Supply

of labour bad in quality." "Labourers sufficient in number, but their efficiency is not what it used to be." From Sussex—page 453: "Labourers receive more money, but are morally worse than ten or fifteen years ago." "Good men are scarce." I need not prolong these references. Of course the evidence is not all on one side. There are a certain number of witnesses who assert that labour in their own districts is not below the average. But the overwhelming mass of testimony is the other way. And I find it completely confirmed by the accounts which I have received from many of the same counties in the present year, 1887, from Hampshire, Wiltshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Warwickshire, Rutland, and Lincolnshire.

At the same time, it is important to remember that although the deterioration of labour has now assumed such serious dimensions, and forms so prominent a feature in the agricultural question of the day, the complaint is no new one. We have only to turn to the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834 to find sentences that might have been taken word for word from the Report of 1880—"much degenerated," "not such good workmen as formerly," "twelve men now only do the work that nine did," "workmen are generally not equal to their fathers." And when I had occasion to make inquiries on the same subject in 1870, I found the farmers saying much the same.¹ The difference, however, between the three periods is this, that in 1834 and 1870 the inferior work complained of was due rather to want of will than to want of skill on the labourer's part. Now it is due to both. Then the skilled workmen

¹ *Vide supra*, p. 12.

were still there, now they are not. Then there was no exodus from the soil. Now there is. This it is which makes the phenomena in question so much more serious now than they were either seventeen years ago or fifty-three years ago. It is further to be noted that the complaint is not confined to England. In Mr. Jenkins' "Report on Belgium," p. 789, we find several of his informants speaking in just the same terms of the Belgian agricultural labourer.

1906

Matters have not changed for the better during the last twenty years. From Northamptonshire we hear that skilled labour is much better paid for than it used to be; obviously because it is much scarcer. From Leicestershire we have two reports, one from a land agent, another from a small farmer. The former writes:

"I have been an occupier of land for thirty years, and I have never known a time when a first-class agricultural labourer—by first class, I mean a reliable and trustworthy shepherd; a reliable and trustworthy waggoner: a man who can cut a hedge properly; thatch and drain properly"—could earn so much money per week, per annum, as at the present time. But it is sad to say all these good men are over thirty-five years of age; and when they die I am afraid the good agricultural labourer will be like the dodo, extinct, as all the young lads either go to factories, collieries, railways, or towns."

My other informant says the girls all go to the hosiery business, where they can earn from 10s. to 12s. a week, and there is a great scarcity of domestic

servants. The boys all go to the shoe trade, and the farmer finds a similar difficulty in getting juvenile labour. This, however, is not equally true of the purely rural districts where there are no factories handy. There it is the education system which deprives the farmer of this kind of labour. From one of the West Midland counties,¹ my correspondent writes that the boys like to get to farm work, and both parents and child then think they ought to be free of school at thirteen if not earlier. There is no great scarcity of unskilled labourers anywhere now; and in some districts the "reaction" prophesied in this volume twenty years ago, at page 79, has already begun. The following communication from a large farmer and land agent in Lincolnshire throws some light on the whole question. In the district from which it comes matters are improving: "The supply of skilled labourers on the farms in this county has been decreasing for several years. About ten or twelve years ago the exodus of young men to the towns seeking employment was continuous. So the young farm hand left behind took no pride in his work. The more intelligent among them had no chance of becoming skilled workmen, as there was no one to teach them. The older men versed in all the mysteries of hedging and ditching, draining, sheep-washing, thatching, and even ploughing, were dying out; and the men of five-and-twenty and thirty, who should have taken their place, had taken their skill to another market. Out of twelve men on a large farm near Wainfleet there was not one who could thatch a rick, or even make one. Gradually, however, this craze to get away from the

¹ Gloucestershire. See Appendix II., Labour.

land has been abating. Men who flocked to the towns found that, with high rents and high prices against them, they did not always 'better themselves'; still more, that latterly the demand for labour in the towns was falling off. In the last twelve months this has been remarkably evident. In this and the next parish several young fellows who threw up their places because the farmers required hours of work from 6.15 a.m. to 5.45 p.m., and went off in a body to Grimsby, were back again in a few days asking to be taken on again at the farmer's terms, but he would not take them, having a plentiful supply of labour."

My informant (who is well up in farm management over districts near Lincoln, Wragby, Louth, and holds twelve farms in his own hands in the Boston, Spilsby, and Wainfleet districts) states that there is now no difficulty in getting able and useful men, though not *skilled* hands, as in the old days, before the rush for town set in. A few years ago he had to ask the lads as a favour to stay on, and, at the least word of complaint, they would say: "Oh, pay me my money, I can go." Now he can decline their services and get hands from a distance. For the last few weeks there have been young men waiting about in Boston market-place, having in vain tried for work in the inland towns. On the whole, he thinks that the prospects of the labour supply have much improved, and will improve, if we can continue to build good cottages, with pure water supply and good drainage.

From Dorsetshire and Wiltshire I hear also that the exodus is abating. Peasants are beginning to find out that they can live cheaper in the country,

and that if wages are not so good, still they are better off there. One correspondent says that there is plenty of labour in these counties, but not skilled labour — “the youngsters won’t be taught.” He adds: “My opinion is, that we require a different education for the country children, compared to the town, and that they ought to commence to work, or rather to leave school, much earlier, as now they are too old to be taught much.”

The farmers protest most vehemently, though here, too, there are a few scattered exceptions, against the working of the Education Act. The labourers, as I have already stated, seem to accept it more contentedly; though the farmers say that they, too, are dissatisfied with the loss of their children’s earnings. The truth seems to be that the labourer’s feeling on the subject is that of the man who wants to eat his cake and have it; that they wish their children to enjoy the higher education, while grumbling at their detention in school when they might be earning money in the field.¹ The farmers find fault with the Education Act on two grounds. In the first place, it deprives them of juvenile labour; in the second place, it inspires the rising generation with a distaste for agricultural work, and sends all the most intelligent youths of the village—the stuff out of which the old class of skilled labourers were made—to seek their fortunes elsewhere. A few survive, and are highly paid and much respected; but the less intelligent and industrious of the younger men—those, that is, who remain at home—form the class of day labourers of whom such general complaints are heard, and whom, in default of better, the

¹ Appendix II., Labour—Gloucestershire and Dorsetshire.

farmers are driven to employ, in spite of the slovenly and imperfect fashion in which their work is executed.

It is difficult to say which of the two wants the farmers seem to think the more injurious: the want of skilled adults, or the want of boys and girls, making it necessary to employ men to do children's work; the increase in the cost of labour which is thus created being assigned as one of the principal causes of agricultural distress by nineteen farmers out of twenty. A farmer in Lincolnshire told Mr. Druce that he had suffered nearly as much by the working of the Education Act as by all the bad seasons put together.¹ The farmers still say what they said in the Report of 1867-8, that unless children begin to learn farm work and the management of animals before they are fourteen they never learn it at all. But the chief grievance is that boys are kept at school when they could do useful work in the field at boy's wages, and that when they leave school they do not care to turn to farm work at any price. Thus the farmers are obliged to use adult labour when juvenile labour at half the money² would do just as well, and are at the same time deprived of their former supply of good, serviceable men fit for all kinds of farm work the whole year round. One remarkable symptom is pointed out by Mr. Clare Sewell Read,³ who says that among the present class of labourers there is a growing dislike of piecework. They all desire to be paid alike; the worst the same as the best. This is a doctrine which has crept into the country from the towns, and I

¹ Supplementary Report, p. 55.

² Cf. *supra*, p. 54.

³ See Gloucestershire Table, p. 12.

never remember hearing of it among the agricultural labourers till the present time. The notion, of course, is a serious impediment to the development of skilled labour, and there is some justice in the farmers' complaint of *sic vos non vobis*. While they pay the education rate, the improved labour in which they were to find an equivalent for it eludes their grasp, and the intelligence developed at their expense goes to benefit the adjoining towns.

The references which I have given to the Reports of the Commissioners on the subject of the deterioration of labour will serve to illustrate the farmer's views on education. The two are so closely connected together that they are generally named together. But I should advise the reader to look more particularly to the answers returned to Mr. Doyle's circular¹ in the counties of Oxford, Warwick, Stafford, Gloucester, Hereford, and Monmouth. The questions asked were these:—"Are children regularly and frequently employed, and if so, at what work and wages? Have the Education Acts made any difference in this respect, and if so, how has such difference affected (a) the farmer; (b) the labourer; (c) the children?" In the answers given he will find every one of the statements here made supported by a long succession of witnesses, and illustrated in every possible way which a practical knowledge of farming can suggest.² Boys cannot be procured for picking stones, minding pigs, scaring birds, tenting or weeding, and the crops suffer in consequence.³ Men instead of boys must be employed to drive the horses at plough, and when the best

¹ P. 330.

² Cf. particularly evidence at pp. 333, 334.

* ³ Report, p. 306.

boys leave school they turn up their noses at agriculture, and leave only the refuse for the farmer. These, partly from dulness, partly from sharing the discontent of the cleverer ones, whom, however, they are not sharp enough to emulate, are wholly uninterested in field work and refuse to be instructed.¹ "Only the lowest drones are left," says a Warwickshire farmer, "and there are no young men left who care to learn the skilled work at the farm. This is a very serious question for the future."² It is fair to the farmers to say that they are not hostile to education as such. They allow that where the best boys do by any chance take to field work they make far better servants than the others. The other boys who stay at home "are stronger, and seem happier and more intelligent, but not so useful with horses and cattle." The evidence is always given in a very fair spirit. But the general tendency of the answers is all one way. I might give in detail the results to be gathered on the same subject from Mr. Coleman, Mr. Druce, and Mr. Little, in the Northern counties, and in Bedfordshire, Bucks, Cambridge-shire, Derbyshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Hunting-donshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Northampton, Notts, Rutland, Suffolk, Kent, Sussex, Berkshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Somersetshire, and Devonshire. But I can assure my readers that they are all alike, nor has the lapse of seven years apparently made any difference.

No more has the lapse of twenty years since then. And the reader can easily see from the foregoing (1906) tables how much the farmers do really lose by the detention of their children at school up to fourteen

¹ See Leicestershire Report, 1906, p. 41.

² Doyle, p. 332.

years of age. Where boy labour is in special demand and specially essential "the farmers resent a strict enforcement of school attendance. They think that the age for exemption in the country should be earlier than in the towns." The rate of wages during the potato and celery harvest in Lincolnshire, *i.e.*, more or less from June to October, is per day for men 5s., women and boys 2s. 6d., children 1s. 6d.¹

From this it will be seen how large a sum (even from £5 to £6 per week) may be earned by a labourer who can take four or five children into the Early Potato Harvest. No wonder that at such times labourers persist in keeping their children from school, and prefer to pay the fine for non-attendance.

It will be asked, no doubt, how it is that, if the labourers have lost so much by the exclusion of their children from field work since the passing of the Education Act, they are so much better off than they were before the Act was passed. The rise in wages and the cheapness of necessities may have made up the difference, but would, one would suppose, have done no more. Yet they certainly live in a very much better style, and with many more comforts round them, than they were formally accustomed to. The explanation, I suppose, is that the pinch is only for a short time; that their children are not all at school at once, and that when the older ones leave the village, they cease also to live at home, where their earnings, except for a brief period, would do no more than keep them, if they did that. If we turn back to the Report of 1867-8, which was specially directed to the employment of children in agriculture,

¹ See Appendix II., Labour—Account of Potato Industry.

we shall find some reason to doubt whether children's labour—however valuable to the farmer—is quite so profitable to the parents as at first sight it might appear. It was constantly stated in that Report that the earnings of children under ten years of age barely equalled the difference between the expense of keeping them at home and the expense of keeping them at work, with the extra food and clothes which they then require. Still, there are three years at least during which their labour is remunerative, which are now in great part lost to the parents and lost to the farmers; and though I am assured that a remedy is to be found in the more stringent administration of the Act, it seems strange that the farmers should for so many years have either failed to discover it or made no effort to apply it.

It will hardly be disputed that early familiarity with the details of any kind of work is a very great advantage to the man whose lot it is to live by it. In some kinds of work it may be said to be indispensable; and the farmers contend that agriculture is one of these. They say, for instance, that boys can never learn the management of horses unless they begin very young. And we are quite prepared to believe it, since it is observable that a thorough insight into the nature of animals is seldom possessed but by those who have played with them as children. And we must recollect, too, that an intelligent boy is being educated, in a way, all the time he is at work. He learns

“ Ventos et varium cœli prædiscere morem,

Et quid quæque ferat regio, et quid quæque recuset.”

It is by exercising his powers of observation on

these and kindred subjects that he rises to the top of his profession, and is revered like old Kester Bale in "Adam Bede,"¹ who "knew the natur of all farming work" better than any man in the three parishes. It is men of this stamp who do well on little farms of their own, if they are ever lucky enough to get them. And it is questionable what equivalent for this untaught wisdom the majority of boys obtain by being kept at school till they are fourteen.

The mind is more open to receive deep and lasting impressions from outward things in early childhood than during the years which immediately succeed it. It seems at first sight hard for the Legislature to step in and prohibit prompt initiation into these Saturnian mysteries. Certainly city men would think it very hard if they were forbidden to send their sons to the counting-house or the solicitor's office at any age they liked. Fancy, it may be said, Parliament enacting that no lad should go to business under, say, eighteen years of age, lest his intellect should be cramped by professional studies before it had been properly cultivated by a due course of the "higher education." At the same time, there are arguments to be adduced on the other side. It is urged that if children go to farm work very young, they are liable to physical injury, which will do more to damage their prospects than physical training to advance them; that purely technical training must be accompanied by some of that general intelligence which a certain degree of schooling is required to develop; and that this is especially true in these

¹ This class is dying out. See Appendix II., Labour--Dorsetshire,

days, when agriculture is becoming a highly scientific industry, and machinery, demanding skilled labour, is being introduced into almost every operation. Still we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by either of these arguments. There is abundant evidence to show that the physical injury which young children are said to sustain has been greatly exaggerated; while it seems probable that much of the machine work which the labourers now have to conduct is as purely mechanical as anything else upon a farm, and often, indeed, requires less intelligence and less knowledge than the old methods of agriculture.

CHAPTER III

COTTAGES—1906 ¹

ON no question affecting the agricultural labourer have I found greater difference of opinion than on cottage accommodation. My Lincolnshire correspondent thinks that the partial arrest of the exodus (see p. 43) is due to allotments and improved cottages; and he thinks that if the supply of good cottages, with pure water and good drainage, is kept up the labourers will gradually return. We suppose, therefore, that in this part of the world cottage accommodation was, till recently, bad. It is so still in two other counties from which I have received returns, though it must be remembered that such statements inevitably relate to only parts of counties. In Hampshire there are villages where the quality of cottages and the sanitary conditions are bad. I have received a very bad account of some villages in Cheshire, where the water supply is so bad that deaths are attributable to it.

But then, curiously enough, from neither of these districts come any complaints of the scarcity of labour, or of the exodus of the fittest. In the Lincolnshire districts, if allotments have only just been introduced, no doubt they would have the effect here ascribed to them. But in all the adjoining they have been in existence half a century, and have not kept the peasantry on the land. In South Leicestershire we

¹ See Appendix III.

have seen what an experienced farmer and land agent says about the labourer, yet in the district with which he is acquainted "the cottages have been greatly improved during the last seven years. Most of them have three private bedrooms, with fireplaces in each, good living room and parlour, and each has a large garden of nearly a rood, and never let for more than 2s. a week." Yet the boys and girls and young men still go off to the towns.

In Northamptonshire the cottages, I am told, are very good, and those which I have seen myself bear out this assertion. Yet according to one Northamptonshire correspondent, the exodus still continues, and the farmers who do not suffer from bad cottages are ceasing to bring up their sons to agriculture, and sending them off to the towns the same as the peasantry.

In Oxfordshire, on the borders of Berkshire, the labourers get good cottages, with large gardens, for a rent varying from 1s. to 1s. 8d. a week.

From my Essex correspondent, to whom I shall refer again presently, I have an account of the younger generation of labourers in his district quite inconsistent with their being badly housed, or with any account of sanitary or decent accommodation. In Dorset and Wilts, once of bad reputation, cottages are improving.

The truth is, however, that in many parts of England the cottage question is solving itself. The population of the villages is deserting them, and cottages are standing empty. The exodus of the stocking-makers in some counties has left a plentiful supply of cottages for the labourers; and I know one village in which a cottage with two sitting-rooms,

three or four bedrooms, and from a quarter to half a rood of garden, is let for 1s. 6d. a week. Formerly this cottage would have been let in two, now it is knocked into one, and though the cause cannot be regarded without uneasiness and anxiety, the fact itself is, of course, highly beneficial to those who are left upon the spot.

Nineteen years have elapsed since these words were written, but I am sorry to say that I still have reports both from the North and the South, representing the cottage accommodation in many rural villages as highly unsatisfactory, and this not from scarcity of cottages, but from defective sanitary arrangements. One of the most important functions attaching to the Parish Council is the supervision of sanitary arrangements. But I am told that officials are so hampered in the discharge of their duties that they are nearly useless.

It should not be forgotten, while we are dealing with the cottage question, that the old system under which the farm servants lived in the farmhouse survives only in a very few English counties. It still prevails in the North — in Westmoreland, Cumberland, and probably in the two other Northern counties, and in Wales and Cheshire—but in England in general it is only carters and shepherds who are boarded, the result, of course, being that single men and lads have been obliged to find lodgings among the cottagers, and so increase the crowding of which we have heard so much. On the whole, however, it is evident that the improvement of cottages, of which Mr. Little and Mr. Doyle saw the beginning, both in 1858 and in 1878, has been maintained, and that whatever may be the case in particular localities, the cottage question can hardly now be alleged as one of the causes of the exodus.

CHAPTER IV

ALLOTMENTS

THE allotment system has been so completely revolutionised by the Act of 1887, that the greater part of the following chapter is useful only as showing what it formerly was, with what object it was introduced, and on what principle it was conducted. The history of the movement is told briefly in the Report of the Commission for Inquiry ; but the employment of women and children in agriculture (1867-8), which, if not in every particular correct, affords a strong presumption that there have been periods in England when the labouring man was better off than he is now.¹ Without taking our readers all the way back to the fourteenth century, it may be sufficient to report that in Acts of Parliament passed in the reign of Edward VI. and Elizabeth the claim of the peasantry to have a certain quantity of land attached to their cottages is clearly recognised. At the same time they were privileged to pasture their cattle and to cut their firewood on the lord's wastes ; and it is obvious that the condition of comfort to which they were raised by these combined advantages is only fairly described as one of "rude abundance." During the Wars of the Roses the condition of the peasant had declined, and

¹ *I.e.*, 1870. This statement must be received with caution in 1887.

the Acts referred to were intended to revive his prosperity. Whether by means of them, or in spite of them, his prosperity did revive, till, by the beginning of the seventeenth century, he was as well off as he had been in the fourteenth. He languished again during the Civil War and under the Protectorate, but experienced a second *renaissance* after the Revolution; and for the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century he enjoyed a kind of golden age. At the end of that time two events occurred, almost simultaneously, which had a marked effect on the condition of the English peasantry—the Enclosure Acts, which were passed between 1760 and 1774; and the American War, which broke out the year afterwards. The first curtailed his means; the second, by raising prices, increased his expenditure. Such, at least, is the account given by the Commissioners.¹ But Tooke, in his “History of Prices,” denies that war, *per se*, has any tendency to raise them. The price of wheat, in fact, did not rise during the first years of the American War, and from 1742 to 1748, the war of the Austrian succession, the average price was much below that of the ensuing six years. The great expansion of the population after the Peace of Paris (1763), followed by a long succession of very bad seasons, produced a great rise in prices *before* the American War; but from 1771 to 1791 there was little difference. Of course, when we happen to be at war with a great grain-producing country like Russia, or when the ports of the Continent are shut against us, as in the last French war, the case is very different.

By an Act of Parliament passed in the thirty-first

¹ To the accuracy of which, however, I do not pledge myself.

year of Queen Elizabeth, it was enacted that no cottage should be erected without having four acres of land attached to it. And in 1648 special attention was called to this Act by the judge at York Assizes. It is probable, however, that, as land grew more valuable and cottages more numerous, it was found impossible to comply literally with this enactment. By the accession of George III. the ordinary labourer had probably ceased, as a rule, to be a cultivator of the soil on his own account; but he still enjoyed to the full his rights of common. And these, combined with a rate of wages high in proportion to the cost of necessaries, enabled him to live in great comfort. But when, almost at one and the same moment, the rights of common were abolished and the cost of living was increased, a rapid revolution took place. Those who had small freeholds were obliged to sell them. Those who had derived from their daily labour, and from the cow, the pig, and the poultry which roamed over the adjoining common, a comfortable and substantial livelihood, found themselves reduced to penury. The yeoman sank into a peasant, and the peasant sank into a pauper. From that time to this, in spite of the efforts of philanthropic individuals, charitable societies, and even Acts of Parliament, the position of the agricultural labourer had never till quite recently recovered itself. A society was set on foot in 1796, by Mr. Wilberforce and Sir Thomas Bernard, for improving the condition of the cottager and renewing his connection with the land, and in that association lay the germs of the allotment system. But the allotment proper was a later development, and the best information on the subject is still to be found in the evidence given

before the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834. It is strongly recommended by them that these plots of land must and should not exceed a rood in extent, and should always be rented from private individuals rather than the parish authorities, and from the clergyman or the squire rather than the farmers.

Allotments and small holdings are, or were, two essentially distinct things. To treat them in any way as if they stood upon the same footing is to blunder on the very threshold of the question. If we choose to convert a certain proportion of agricultural labourers into small farmers, so be it; but that the same man can be a small farmer and an agricultural labourer at the same time I hold to be impossible. Yet it is this that the Act of 1887 really contemplates. An allotment is a plot of ground, detached from the cottage, which the labourer and his family can cultivate in their spare time without trenching in the slightest degree on the regular working hours which earn the weekly wages. The size varies from a rood to an acre, the latter being, as a rule, the most on which an ordinary day labourer can bestow the necessary care. Allotments were formerly regarded rather as incentives to industry and good conduct than as representing any share in the occupation of the soil to which the peasantry had a legal claim. I should very much prefer to see them remain on this footing: let by the farmers, the gentry, and the clergy to the most deserving class of labourers, while their alleged right to the Elizabethan four acres was recognised, if possible, by the extension of small holdings. These, if an economical mistake, have a good deal to say for themselves from a moral point of view. But with

the allotment system as it originally existed, I think it was a mistake to interfere. To declare that every agricultural labourer is entitled to an allotment, and that we have no right to annex any conditions to his tenancy which we do not equally annex to the tenancy of a regular farmer, is to change the whole character of the system, and to rob it, in my opinion, of much of its real utility.¹

In Lord Goschen's speech on Mr. Collings' Bill in January, 1886, he said that a compulsory allotment system would undermine the sense of duty on the landlord's part. The party in this country who wish to destroy property in land see that the surest way of attaining the great object of their ambition is to destroy the whole moral influence of the landlords—an influence depending on the discharge of local duties and the exercise of administrative functions, the abolition of which is the most certain means of destroying their hold upon the people. Mr. Gladstone himself has told us how admirably those duties are discharged. And Lord Onslow's little book will show that for nearly the last hundred years they have been promoting a system which Mr. Collings and others describe as a novel experiment, if not, indeed, as quite a new discovery. Why throw away so valuable an instrument for good in the hands of employers and landowners when the object for the sake of which it is proposed to make this great sacrifice can be so much more effectually secured by another process?

In 1887 two Acts of Parliament were passed for the benefit of the agricultural labourer, one the

¹ See Appendix.

Labourer's Allotment Act, the other, with which we are more immediately concerned, the Allotment and Cottage Gardens' Compensation for Crops Act. By the second it is provided that upon the determination of the tenancy of an allotment after the commencement of this Act, the tenant shall be entitled, notwithstanding any agreement to the contrary, to obtain from the landlord compensation in money for the following matters and things, that is to say :

(a) For crops, including fruit, growing upon the allotment in the ordinary course of cultivation, and for fruit trees and fruit bushes growing thereon, which have been planted by the tenant with the previous consent in writing of the landlord.

(b) For labour expended upon, and for manure applied to the allotment, since the taking of the last crop therefrom in anticipation of a future crop.

(c) For drains and for any outbuildings, pig-sties, fowl-houses, or other structural improvements made by the tenant upon his holding with the written consent of his landlord.

Thus it will be seen that the old-fashioned system so highly commended by all the skilled enquirers who have reported on our agricultural condition during the last seventy years has been swept away at a blow. To class cottage gardens with allotments is as great a mistake as to compare small holdings with allotments. The cottage and garden should be let together as one tenancy. But it seems that gardens attached to those cottages, which are assigned to farm servants as part of their wages, do not come under the Act.

I should be glad to see any number of small farmers in this country, if their existence could be reconciled with the working of economic laws.

Let them be made as independent as possible, with every security which the Agricultural Holdings Act supplies for tenant farmers in general. But it is surely a misapplication of the purpose of that Act to bring allotments within its operation. Let the labourer, while he is a labourer, have his allotment on the reasonable condition that he exhibits those virtues which will qualify him hereafter for the position of a small farmer.¹ This is his true road to independence. Let him rise from one class to the other, according as his own exertions shall enable him to do so. Let every facility exist for his translation to a higher sphere; but while he remains an agricultural labourer, let him be an agricultural labourer. We have seen what are his deficiencies at the present day.² He is ignorant of his duties, and unwilling to be taught them. The consciousness that a good working character from his master is the condition on which he holds his allotment, may be made, perhaps, to serve as a corrective, and to lead him to acquire by degrees that more general knowledge of farming operations which he is now too indolent to learn. If such has been the effect of the allotment system in past times,³ how much more beneficial are we likely to find it in the future? If only half of what is alleged by the most competent witnesses on the subject is to be believed, one of the most urgent agricultural necessities of the present day is the restoration of that supply of skilled labour which is every year becoming scarcer,⁴ and for want of which so many farms in England are condemned

¹ Appendix IV. Important testimony.

² Cap. iv.

³ Mr. Doyle's Report, p. 312.

⁴ Leicestershire, 1906. See Appendix and p. 41.

to imperfect cultivation. It seems to me that the allotment system, rightly used, might be made largely subservient to this object; while, at the same time, it would help to make the labouring man more fit¹ for the position which he covets—a position to which, in the present state of his professional attainments, he seems totally unequal. To put such men as those who form the great bulk of the agricultural “residuum” into farms of four or five acres would be to consign them to certain ruin.² One of the first conditions of success in such a holding is that the occupier shall be able to do great part of the necessary labour with his own hands. It follows, then, that he must become a skilled workman before he can have the slightest chance of succeeding as a small farmer.³

What I wish to see, then, is a system which, while offering a future to the agricultural labourer, and a position of independence to which he can look forward as the reward of his own exertions, shall interfere with none of those conditions which afford a means of influencing his character while he continues to be a labourer. Such influence will benefit himself by contributing to the formation of habits and the development of intelligence essential to his prosperity in any wider sphere of industry; it will benefit the farmer by giving him a better class of servants; and it will benefit the public by removing one of the causes which tend to impoverish the soil and diminish its productive powers.

It may be said, perhaps, that the allotment system requires to be accommodated to changed circumstances, and that the old paternal system which the

¹ Cf. p. 152.

² Rep., 1834.

³ Appendix IV.

Poor Law Commissioners of 1834 found in existence, and of which they and the Agricultural Commissioners of 1870 and 1880 spoke so highly, has served its purpose, and that it must now be placed on a more commercial footing, which will encourage the holder to try and save money by it, and so enable himself to improve his position by getting more land into his hands. I quite see the force of this argument. Only where the extent of land available for allotments is limited, if one man gets three or four into his own hands, what is to become of other applicants? When there are vacancies, and no one else comes to fill them, then such a man would be in the right place. But he would then cease to be an agricultural labourer, and would become a small farmer. He could never save the requisite amount of money on an ordinary allotment.

A good deal has been said about the proper situation of allotments; and it has been represented as a grievance that the labourer cannot always have them close to his own door. The nearer the better, no doubt. That is obvious. But the land which lies at the back of the farm-houses and cottages is almost always in the occupation of farmers, and is to them an absolute necessity. The "home close" on which the farmyard opens could not be taken away without inflicting intolerable inconvenience on the tenant. It is almost indispensable that he should have a certain amount of grazing ground within easy reach of his cow-sheds and rick-yards, so that cows and beasts can readily be foddered or sheltered in severe weather.

The following quotation from the Report of 1834 may well conclude this chapter. It is even more to

the purpose now than it was then : " If letting land to the poor, though beneficial to the occupier, required a sacrifice on the part of the lessor, it is clear that it could not prevail extensively, unless it were effected at the expense of the public. And that if such system were adopted, as the land applicable to that purpose, or, indeed, to any other purpose is limited, and the number of applicants is rapidly augmenting, every year would increase the difficulty of supplying fresh allotments, and diminish their efficiency in reducing the increasing mass of pauperism, until the arrival of a crisis, when it would be necessary either to give up the system, resume the land, and clear it as we could of its inhabitants, or abandon the whole country to a helpless and desperate population." They say also what is repeated in the following chapter : " That the extent of land which a labourer can occupy beneficially seldom exceeds half an acre. If he ceases to rely on his wages, and becomes, in fact, a petty farmer before he has accumulated a capital sufficient to meet not only the current expenses but the casualties of that hazardous trade—if he has to encounter the accidents of the seasons, instead of feeling them at second hand after their force has been broken on the higher classes—his ultimate ruin seems to be almost certain " (Report, p. 192).

CHAPTER V

SMALL HOLDINGS

IN the larger edition of this work the whole question of allotments and small holdings—two very distinct things by-the-by—was gone into at considerable length, and to this I must refer such of my readers as are desirous of more minute information. As regards allotments, there are, I think, no two sides to the question. But to the question of small holdings there are several. After carefully collating all the Blue Books and Reports since the year 1860, and combining with the evidence so obtained the result of my own independent inquiries in more than twenty English counties, and of my own observation in others with which I was personally acquainted, I could but come to the very commonplace and uninteresting conclusion that in some circumstances small holdings were desirable and likely to be successful, and in others the reverse. The conditions essential to success are so far from identical in all parts of England, and of the small holdings themselves the varieties are so numerous, that to offer more than a very brief summary of what I have said elsewhere would be inconsistent with the publisher's demand for an abridged edition.

The labourers themselves seem divided in opinion as to the comparative advantages of tenancy and ownership. In Westmoreland they prefer the latter;

in Lincolnshire the former. In Sussex, Mr. Scawen Blunt says they do not care for fixity of tenure. They like to be free; which means, of course, that they would rather be renters than proprietors. The holding may be either grass or arable, or a mixture of the two. The farmer may be either the owner or the tenant. The size may vary from five or six acres to thirty. It may be held either by one who has some little business of his own besides, or by one who has only the land to depend on.

If we regard the small holding simply in the light of an attraction to lure back the labourer to the land, we shall find that its capacities in this respect are not unlimited.¹ If our conception of it extends to the creation of a new class of agricultural peasantry seated on small farms carved out of the large estates, we shall discover in time that this, though a very pretty vision, is not within the range of practical possibilities. (See Mr. Scawen Blunt's Article, *Nineteenth Century* for June, 1906.) The preliminary difficulty of acquiring the land and erecting the necessary buildings is among the smallest that confront us, but even that is considerable. Nobody has as yet proposed to make the agricultural labourer a free gift of his neighbour's property. He will have to pay for it in some way or another, at some time or another; and if he starts on his new career with this debt hanging over him, he will have an uphill fight. If he is only a tenant he will have rent to pay; and a bad season, or two bad seasons running, will throw him irretrievably behindhand.² He will now less risk on a grass holding than on ploughland; but even on the former any losses from accident or disease

¹ But see Appendix IV., p. 157.

² Poor Law Report.

among his live stock will have nearly the same effect.

Of course if the labourer comes to his holding in possession of a certain amount of capital which may tide him over such contingencies, well and good. But how many such men are likely to be found among the applicants for small farms? For such when found let small farms be provided by all means. The kind of man as described by Lord Wantage will be found in the Appendix. Or if it is supposed that those who have taken to the towns may save money enough in more lucrative employment to enable them to return to the country and set themselves up as peasant farmers, the supposition seems to me to be founded on a very slender knowledge of human nature, as well as of the class who are expected to act in this manner. By the time the ex-villager had saved enough money in the factory to enable him to return to the fields, he would be an elderly man, with new tastes and habits formed in quite a different atmosphere, and in the large majority of instances, wholly disinclined to return to the drudgery of a small farm with all its hardships and privations. If it is meant that facilities for obtaining land would prevent the rising generation of peasantry from migrating to the town, we are thrown back on the initial objection, the inexpediency—that is, of starting the small farmer on his career with borrowed money or with none at all; to which may now be added the further difficulty created by the withdrawal of his children from farm work, and the loss of their services during several years of his tenancy.

But the big fact which we have to face is that the

peasant farmer, as a rule, has no staying power—and this assertion is corroborated by evidence adducible from abroad, as well as from what is furnished at home. The Report drawn up by Mr. Jenkins and Mr. Sutherland on the state of agriculture in France, Holland, and Belgium all tell the same tale. "On the first reverse," says Mr. Lippens, a witness from East Flanders, "the small farmer falls back into the day labourer."

But it is another of these writers, M. Laveleye, who goes nearest to the point on which Englishmen desire information, when he frankly admits that what writers on France, Belgium, and Holland have to say in favour of *la petite culture* is but remotely applicable to England. "*It is,*" says he, "*the glory of England to have remained free from the consequences usually attending the large property system. Great Britain possesses a class of landowners and tenants alive to the requirements of agriculture; and her gigantic commerce has provided employment for the small freeholders whose farms have been swallowed up.*" It is evidently M. Laveleye's opinion that agriculture is pursued to most advantage under these conditions, and that it is the want of them which prolongs the continental system of husbandry and land tenure. To introduce this system into England because it flourishes in France would be, in his eyes, to throw away the favours of fortune, to abdicate our own superiority, and to commit a mistake analogous to that which would solve the perplexities of civilisation by a return to barbarism. The following assertion, too, from a competent witness, is worth volumes of speculation. Large farms in Holland and Belgium are

not, he tells us, so well cultivated as small, because men who have capital for the former despise agriculture, while those who have only capital enough for the latter are just the class which is devoted to it.

Another French authority, who is usually mentioned with respect by all English writers on this subject, and is often cited as an advocate of *la petite culture*, M. de Lavergne, records his judgment in favour of middle-sized properties, such as exist chiefly in Maine and Anjou, in the following terms:—"La petite culture ne réussit que dans des conditions déterminées; la grande aboutit presque toujours au luxe et à l'absentéisme qui la dévorent; la moyenne présente à la fois plus de ressources que la première, et moins d'entraînements que la seconde." ("Economie Rurale de la France.") And he speaks most favourably of the class of proprietors, which in France represents the smaller class of English gentry, who habitually reside on their estates.

The same writer, in his "Rural Economy of Great Britain," speaks still more strongly to the same effect, and has anticipated many of the remarks of M. Laveleye. He states that the conditions of property in England are more favourable to agriculture than those of France; that it is a matter of regret that large aristocratic estates no longer exist in that country, but that Frenchmen must make the best they can of a bad bargain; that farming in France is not, as it is in England, a profession by which men seek to make money, but merely a condition of life in which they are content to exist; that this is due in great part to the want of markets, which causes the small proprietor to live on the produce

of his soil, without much thought beyond it; that in spite of all these causes *la petite culture* is not upon the increase in France; that for many years past the increase in the number of large properties has been greater than that of small; and he ventures to predict that the small French proprietors will go the way of English yeomen, and gradually subside into tenants. Both very large farms and very small farms, he thinks, are on the decrease in both France and England; while farms of three or four hundred acres are likely to become the general rule. Exceptions will prevail in certain districts—in large sheep-feeding districts, for instance—such as the Wiltshire Down country; but on the whole it is beginning to be understood that one man cannot possibly do justice to more than a given number of acres of arable land.

In the last number¹ of the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society* may be seen the testimony of another “intelligent foreigner,” Dr. Voelcker, to the merits of petty culture in Flanders, which may be summed up as follows:—In Flanders farms of twenty acres yield more than farms of ten, and farms of fifty more than farms of twenty; the first prize for cultivation was awarded, at the last meeting of the Flemish Agricultural Society, to a farm of a hundred and five acres; high rents and low wages are the characteristic of *la petite culture*, and high wages and low rents of *la grande*; the large farm system is more conducive to national prosperity, because it sets labour free for other industries; when a railway is opened in the Walloon country, the agricultural labourers, who can travel a hundred miles for half-a-crown, flock into the manufacturing districts, and in

¹ No. xi., vol. vi., Part 1, 1870.

three months cause the rate of wages to have risen by 20 per cent. Where the only employment for people is agriculture, large farms are impossible; but such a state of things is "a political and commercial disease." The opinion of this gentleman clearly is, that to throw more of the population into agriculture than is necessary to get the highest amount of produce out of it, is a waste of power, and that this, where it cannot be helped, points to some radical defect in the national system. Thus in Ireland, where there are few manufactures, such waste may be inevitable. To introduce it where we have manufactures would be sheer infatuation. Such seems to be the opinion of M. de Lavergne, M. Laveleye, and Dr. Voelcker, who are certainly competent, and probably unprejudiced, witnesses. And it is a curious reflection that while Englishmen are engaged in extolling the French system, French writers should be engaged at the same time in extolling the English.

The enemies of *la petite culture* should avoid overstating their case. By contending that the system is a failure where it can be shown to answer, they strengthen the belief that it would answer where it is almost certain to fail. But when due consideration has been given to the evidence supplied by foreign countries, the case for and against *la petite culture* in England must depend on the evidence which is to be found within the four corners of England herself; and on this subject, I find, as I have said, no difference of opinion between the Reports of the Agricultural Commissions of 1879-80 and those of its predecessors in 1867-9. To the same effect are the interesting letters which

appeared in the *Times* during the autumn of 1885. And to the same effect is all the fresh testimony supplied to me in 1906.¹ All alike agree that wherever peasant farmers or peasant proprietors are found in England with nothing but their land to depend upon, their farming is bad, their mode of life miserable, and their debts crushing. There are bright exceptions to the rule, no doubt, and sufficiently numerous to show that the exceptionally skilful, industrious, and frugal labourer such as Lord Walougham describes, may succeed upon a small holding. But the compulsory establishment of such cultivation on a large scale, with the help of public money, is a scheme to which I hope "the party of common-sense," as Mr. Goschen says, will never stand committal. In the second generation the majority would all be paupers, and their land a prey to thorns and thistles.

The Parish Councils, however, have as yet made little use of the compulsory power entrusted to them with regard to allotments, and I cannot find that many small holdings have been created by any similar agency. How much better is the system which, according to one of my correspondents, prevails in Westmoreland and Cumberland. In his own parish a large acreage is divided among small holdings, and the occupants appear to be thriving. But why? Because they are, as a rule, held by men who "have saved a little money," and hasten "to invest it in a cottage or land, or both." The peasant who acquires a farm by means of his own savings, amassed by reason of industry and self-denial, acquires it by a natural and self-acting law, which

¹ See Appendix,

is a natural argument for his success, and must always be at the bottom of all healthy and permanent prosperity. To try to force by legislation what can only be really lasting and beneficial if allowed to grow naturally and spontaneously is a mistaken characteristic of the age we live in, but a most disastrous one for all that.

The question is whether the system of *la petite culture* is capable of being renewed in England on a durable and practical basis, not as a plaything for philanthropists, nor yet only as a provision for exceptional cases of superior intelligence and industry, but as a system capable of offering a livelihood to the average labourer, and calculated to become an integral and permanent organ of our rural economy. That a sufficient number of small farms should exist in every country, and on every estate, for the benefit of such labourers as are really qualified to succeed on them, and who care to have them, is universally admitted. I will allow that these, if necessary, may be promoted by Act of Parliament.¹ Controversy begins only when we come to consider the scale on which the system should be extended, and its adaptability to the labouring class in general. I entirely sympathise with the labourer's feelings on the subject. What Arthur Young said nearly a hundred years ago is, no doubt, equally true now, viz., that the sense of independence acquired by the peasant, either as a small farmer, or still more as a small proprietor, would reconcile him to a multitude of hardships ; and

¹ In saying this I have not forgotten Mr. Goschen's arguments against the compulsory extension of allotments by Act of Parliament in his speech on Mr. J. Collings' Bill, Jan. 26, 1886. See Appendix IV.

that, though he had to live much harder than he does as a labourer, he would still think himself better off, and be better satisfied than he is with the social conditions which surround him. Now that he is invested with political power, this consideration acquires tenfold weight. It is this conviction which made me say just now that I should like to see any number of small farmers in this country. But if this happy state of things "would not wash"; if it could last only for a few years; and if the ultimate effect of it was to create only an impoverished and miserable class of squatters, overloaded with debt, and wholly unable to cultivate their land properly, I say the final consequence would be too high a price to pay for the immediate benefit; and that the moral effect on the peasantry, limited to a single generation, would be no equivalent for the risk of physical degradation which would probably be permanent. If we are only to damage agriculture without permanently benefiting the labourer, we had better leave matters as they are. It would neither be for the public good, nor for the good of the peasantry themselves, to introduce a change which should lead to such results as these.

In an article to which we have already referred, Mr. Scawen Blunt asks very pertinently where the land is to come from for a universal system of small holders. He seems to advocate in the abstract the compulsory subdivision of large estates through the machinery of the death-duties. But among other serious difficulties in the way of such a change is the subdivision of tenancies as well, which it would necessarily involve. Mr. Blunt thinks that this would be injurious to agriculture, as well as unjust

to the tenant farmer. There is perhaps no reason why the larger landowners—the smaller ones we could hardly expect to do so—should not set aside bits of their estates for small holdings such as we have described,¹ from five to fifteen acres, to be the reward exclusively of intelligent and frugal labourers who have saved the required amount of capital—and the whole argument for such farms presupposes that they *can* save it—in which case we should get rid of half the evil and retain all the good of *la petite culture*.

But the multiplication of small holders on the scale demanded by the Radicals is hardly compatible with the continued existence of the tenant farmer as we now know him. He would, he must be, gradually, or rather speedily, elbowed out; and one of the most valuable classes of English society would disappear from among us. The farmer has his faults: so has the average city alderman, and so has the average manufacturer. But he is neither above nor below the average level of the middle class, by whom so much of the administration of this country is conducted, and who constitute an element of stability the want of which has been severely felt elsewhere, though here, where we have always had it, we seem scarcely conscious of its value. At all events, this much may be said without fear of contradiction—that if we have no tenant farmers to fill parochial offices, the want of them must be supplied by Government officials, since peasant proprietors would certainly be unequal to such duties, and that thus our whole system of local self-government would be destroyed at a blow. In the second place, the position of the clergyman in

¹ See *Nineteenth Century*, in Appendix.

parishes where there was no rank of population between the peasantry and the gentry would be extremely difficult. The farmers and their families can help him in a thousand ways, and they form a link between himself and the cottagers of inestimable practical utility. Thirdly, consider the effect of withdrawing from every village in England the presence of its six or eight men of capital and intelligence, such as now for the most part rent the land. We ought to be very sure of our ground before we advocate changes which point to such results as this.

Our system no doubt has its own abuses. Both estates and farms are occasionally too large. But that is no reason for rushing into the opposite extreme, unless better testimonies to its superiority than have yet been forthcoming are produced; except, indeed, on the supposition that a political object is to be gained by it, and that the object of our land reformers is not so much the creation of a peasant proprietary as the extinction of a territorial aristocracy. But that is an hypothesis which we have no right to entertain; nor is this the proper place for discussing it. The gap created in our whole rural system by the substitution of *la petite culture* for *la grande* would be most severely felt, if we may not go so far as to say that under present circumstances it would be intolerable.

I have already pointed out the difference between the small holdings, which consists either wholly or in great part of grass, and the same sized farm, which is mostly arable; as also the difference between the small holder who has some other business on hand,

and the small holder who has none. The former on a grass farm shows the system to the greatest advantage. The latter on a corn farm shows it at its worst. The one is likely to prosper; the other is nearly sure to fail, or to ruin the land, if he keeps it, and to live miserably himself.¹ In this edition (1906) a well-known agriculturalist on the borders of Oxfordshire and Berkshire writes as follows:

"Several persons in this parish have held small holdings from ten to fifteen acres, but have failed to make a living, and after a few years given them up."²

"Men, such as carriers, bakers, and shopkeepers, who keep a horse for their business, can manage to work from five to ten acres at a small profit."

The following is Lord Wantage's description of the right man in the right place, referred to at p. 170 :

"He is a man who came from the north of England, where he seems to have saved money as an agricultural labourer. He has got seventeen acres, and is able to pay a good rent and redeem his land gradually at the same time. He has built his own house at a cost of £75, a cow-house and a shed besides, and has fenced in his little property, which now bears four acres of good barley and four of oats; there being grass enough for a dairy and a stock of poultry, which bring him in £1 a week. He will sell his corn for £50 or £60, and in his spare time he works on the road for 12s. a week." It is necessary to point out, however, that this said "spare time" cannot be a great deal; and that the care of seventeen acres of land, even when half of it is

¹ For evidence down to date, see Appendix.

² Appendix IV. — Dorset and Wilts.

grass, is quite incompatible with regular farm work and the receipt of regular wages as an agricultural labourer. Even, however, without this addition to his income he would be comfortably off; and we have never had any doubt at all that small holdings which one man can cultivate for himself without the expense of a horse, if acquired in a legitimate manner, *would* answer. Here, we see, is a man who has been sufficiently thrifty and skilful to save money for himself, thereby giving evidence of the possession of those qualities which enable a man to succeed in life wherever he is placed, and would certainly enable any English peasant to make a good living on a small farm. These are the men for whom such holdings should be reserved. But this is a vastly different thing from placing land acquired with borrowed money at the disposal of the agricultural labourers indiscriminately, and proposing that when they cannot pay the rent it should be made good out of the rates.

"It is obvious," says one of the commissioners, "by what very small error in judgment a small capital may be impaired, rendered unproductive, or totally lost; and certainly nothing can be more wretched than the average farming of a man who, from a labourer, with the aid of his own and a little borrowed capital, has become a farmer on his own account. He buys a plough, a team of horses, and a few implements; he reaps his first crop of stunted oats; and when its straw has been converted, by a few calves and half-starved yearlings, into what can scarcely be called manure, he carts it out into his fields after it has been drenched by winter rains, and is disheartened at the miserable results. To enable

him to pay his rent he is generally obliged to part with his grain, whatever may be its price, and his stock, before it has attained its maximum value; and before the first two years of his tenancy have expired he has too often cause to regret the day on which he was tempted to exchange the safe position of a comfortable farm servant for the anxieties and hardships of a tenant farmer."

The revival of *la petite culture*, however, is still an experiment in England, and such evidence as we possess at present is, in the eyes of political economists, decidedly against it. But I still adhere to what I said thirty years ago.

All honour to the liberality and generosity of those landowners who are resolved to give the experiment a fair chance; for if it succeeds, the blessings they will have conferred, not only on the labourers, but on all classes connected with the land and rural society in general, cannot be over-estimated. To restore the old cheerfulness, loyalty, and contentment of the English peasantry, wherever these qualities have been temporarily obscured, is, in fact, to solve one of the great political problems of the present day, and to reconcile democracy with the permanence of existing institutions. We most earnestly hope that all the efforts which have been made in this direction will meet with the success which they deserve. But is there no reason for supposing that the gradual disappearance of small farmers, small proprietors, and small gentry is due to the operation of a natural law which no legislation could reverse? No man of taste or imagination can think of England as she was, without a sigh for those social changes which have robbed rural life of much

of its picturesqueness, and, it may be, of some of its happiness. But can these changes be undone? We regret these extinct classes, as we regret the beautiful woods and wild heaths which have disappeared with them. But would they now, if artificially restored, bear any resemblance to the original? Would they not rather be exotics, and no longer racy of the soil? England once produced wine; but nobody dreams now of reconverting Kent into a vineyard.¹

And here I cannot do better than quote at full length the opinion of two agricultural experts in Dorsetshire and Wiltshire. "My experience," says one, then a large estate agent near Salisbury:

"My experience of the farmer and agricultural labourer in the district extends over thirty-five years and more. I have also obtained statistics from several well-known men in Dorset. My knowledge of the small occupier of from five to twenty acres is fairly large, and I am convinced that only under very favourable conditions, such as the best land near to a good retail market, can farms of this size be made to pay unless the occupier has some other string to his bow, such as blacksmith, carpenter, hawker, or shopkeeper, etc. Of all the small holdings which have come under my personal knowledge, such as these are the only ones that pay. Dairy farms of fifty acres or over of good grass land, farmed by those who have been bred up to the work, and who do it all themselves, working twice as hard and for much longer hours than the hired labourer, are made to pay; but the man who can farm 200 to 300 is much better off, in proportion, than his smaller brother. The idea of splitting up the large mixed arable and grass farms

¹ For evidence down to date, see Appendix.

into small holdings will not work, as only the best of the land would be suitable, and the poorer parts by themselves could not be farmed at a profit in any way."

Another says: "Going back to small holdings at the public cost would be like doing away by legislation with machinery in mills and reverting to hand labour." A third writes: "Small holdings are a great failure in this neighbourhood. Reasons are that demand being keen, price much higher to rent than large holdings. Landlords have to build a larger amount of buildings when breaking up farms, hence the small tenant has to pay for this—in short, my opinion is, that the larger the holding, the more economically it can be run in every respect. Two of my neighbours here have just been sold up, they had about 100 acres each."

On comparing the above statements with what I wrote forty years ago, it will be seen that this question rests where it did then; and that what I said then is equally true now. I hope it will not be supposed that I am writing against peasant farming in itself. On the contrary, I have lately¹ advocated a plan by which it might be largely and safely extended. But it can only be done on certain conditions, which, if neglected, will only ruin the great majority whom it is intended to benefit, and bring discredit and odium on the whole system.

Let me here repeat what I have said before, namely, that we must not confound the man who with his 8 or 10 acres of land combines some other business, such as the butcher, the publican, or any other village tradesman, with the petty farmer pure and simple

¹ *Nineteenth Century* for July, 1906.

who has nothing but his land to depend upon. It is not fair to judge of the small holding system by the former class, who can generally make it answer. The evidence supplied by the latter is the only fair test.

CHAPTER VII

HIRING

AT the present day (1906) it is only in a few English counties that any but shepherds and waggoners board with the farmers. In Wales the practice is general. The boarding system means, for the most part, yearly hiring. The outdoor labourer is hired by the week. The two great drawbacks upon yearly hiring are, first, the corresponding yearly change which seems to be inseparable from it; and secondly, the vagrant population which it has a tendency to generate. The periodical recurrence of the hiring season suggests to the peasant mind the necessity of being hired. Besides, there is the irresistible attraction of the "statty";¹ and yet why is he to go there unless he goes to get another master? Under the influence of these combined stimulants, men change their masters every year who have no earthly complaint to make against them, and who might otherwise have lived and died in the same service. "No sooner do the master and the servant get into the knowledge of each other's ways, and the latter to understand the master's methods and his land, than Michaelmas comes round and unsettles all again, and the same thing generally occurs year after year."² The second objection to the practice is even more

¹ Statute fair. *Vide infra*, p. 179.

² Evidence of Mr. Frampton in Mr. Fraser's Report.

serious. The day labourer is generally a native of the parish, and a constant resident therein. He and his family feel the full effect of all those local influences which contribute so much to the character of English rural life. They are in continual contact with the clergyman; they have a hereditary respect for the squire; they take a pride in the village; and they have, in fact, all the habits and instincts which are created by a settled life, and the action upon each individual of a local public opinion. The reverse is the case with the labourer who revolves from master to master through a circle of villages, and has no permanent connection with any of them. He becomes like the gipsy,

Αφρήτωρ, αθέμιστος, ἀφέστιος.

"Many of the clergy complain that the greater part of their parishioners change every year. A kind of vagrant population is created, who lose all home ties" (*see Stanhope, II., 196*); and it is impossible to expect from young men of this description a higher degree of morality and respectability than they generally exhibit. They grow up mere animals. In their demeanour they are rude, coarse, and insolent, and are at the bottom of half the evil which goes on in country parishes. These are the choice spirits among the Sunday loungers who constitute so prominent a feature of village life. They are to be seen, for the most part, gathering together in the street on Sunday afternoons, with their hands in their pockets, and occasionally short pipes in their mouths, and setting up a horse-laugh at nothing as the respectable inhabitants go by. The above, by-the-by, is a singular moral phenomenon which

human naturalists have not yet adequately explained. These knots of loutish lads, who regularly assemble at the same hour under some favourite wall or sheltered corner, never seem engaged in talk. There they stand, like the cows, apparently finding pleasure in the company of their fellows, and possibly communicating with each other through some organs which, to ordinary mortals, are unintelligible; but to all appearance they are as dumb as the brute creation, from continued contact with which they may perhaps have acquired these mysterious powers. In 1906 it is only in a few English counties that any but shepherds and carters board with the farmers. And these are not the class here referred to. The practice is general in Wales.

In the North of England, which, by - the - by, supplies exceptions to most of the general rules to be collected from the Commissioners' Reports, the system seems to work well in some important respects. Coupled with the system of boarding, it checks early marriages, and prevents a redundant population, though at a considerable cost to morality. And the men are so well paid that they know, if they are frugal and remain single for a certain time, they can save enough to take a small farm, the *ne plus ultra* of their hopes. To such an extent, indeed, have these considerations prevailed, that the labour market in Cumberland and Westmoreland is now understocked. Still, that is the lesser evil of the two. Small farms, if not, perhaps, commercially desirable, the hope of obtaining them tends to thrift, sobriety, and steadiness.

Finally, and taking England on the whole, we must remember that this system of yearly hiring

tends to circulate the population, and to infuse new blood into the rural communities. The carter or ploughman who takes a place at some distance from his native village chooses a wife among the strangers, and settles down there, perhaps, for the rest of his life. At all events, he has done better physiologically than if he had remained at home and married a relation. And the love of change, and desire to see more of his little world than is open to him in one village, which prompts the young rustic to take service at a distance rather than in his native place, is far from being censurable in itself. The "vagrant population" aforesaid is a considerable evil; but it has its compensating advantages.

The advantages and disadvantages of the weekly system are obviously the reverse. There being no regular recurring period for weekly hirings, there is nothing to suggest to the labourer the idea of change; and it is common to find men who have worked for the same master, or at least upon the same farm, from week to week, for twenty, thirty, or even forty years. In some parts of England—in Bedfordshire, for instance, and Herts—no other custom is known; and throughout the midland counties it prevails extensively. Its disadvantages are, first, that the labourer is less certain of employment; and secondly, that the farmer, as is alleged, is obliged to pay the same wages to good and bad workmen alike. The first objection is raised by Mr. Fraser, who says that weekly wages would seem to imply continuous weekly employment, but that this, in fact, is not so; men are always liable to be sent back on a wet morning, "or if there happen to be no directly remunerative job which he can be set to do." Mr. Fraser admits that

a great many farmers would always try to find or even to make work for their men ; but he thinks there are many who would not, and that these are answerable "for that race of shiftY labourers who have no regard for their employer's interests, of which the farmers in many places so bitterly complain." Yet, after all, it must be considered that if the farmer was not at liberty to adjust the supply of labour to the demand, and was obliged to pay his men whether he wanted them or not, the average of wages would be lower.

The second disadvantage is one which is explained at some length by Mr. Frampton, a farmer near Newbury. He says that payment by the day has a tendency to bring down the best workman to a level with the worst. His evidence is worth quoting: "For instance, we have three men, A., B., C. A. is an able-bodied, industrious, trusty, persevering man, with a good head upon his shoulders, able and willing to turn his hand to anything, not given to eye-service (by which I mean working hard when the master is in sight, but very different when absent) ; in short, he is a man that tries to do his duty. We pay him, say, 2s. per day. B. is a man with equal powers and ability with A., but with an unwilling mind ; can do anything, but would as soon not ; rather given to eye-service, and does not see it necessary to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. We pay him also 2s. per day. C. is a man with very little ability ; in fact, requires educating all over and all day long. We pay him also 2s. per day. Now, is this justice ? and what are its effects ? Naturally to bring down the best gradually to the level of the worst ; and what can it be but a degrading system ?

If A. does not care to see it, B. and C. will soon prove to him that they get as well paid as he does ; and if A. at first conscientiously objects, yet the natural bias of his human nature, combined with the taunts of his fellow-workmen, will gradually bring him down. This I consider a system the very reverse of the one we want to instil, and one that must have a great tendency to keep down the price of labour, because rendering it of so little worth. We want a system that will cause emulation, a striving each one to do his best, with a knowledge that his efforts will be rewarded. But how is this to be attained ? Some, the uninitiated, may say : ‘ Turn off B. and C. —that is, the bad men, and get some more A.s.’ But where are they to be found ? Are you sure of getting any A.s ? And will the demand for labour allow it ? I confess I know not the remedy. Individually, I believe nothing can be done except in exceptional cases, and collectively it must be a great undertaking. Could any kind of class system be introduced ? I am fully aware that the opposition to any great change would be great, but I most sincerely wish some system better than the present might be found.”

But it can hardly be that the system of hiring by the week is solely accountable for this state of things. Does the servant who is hired for a year, or for a month (if he ever is hired for a month), afford any greater facilities for paying him according to his merits ? Must not the average rate of wages in the district be given to all alike, in the one case as well as in the other ? The true remedy seems to be the one suggested at the latter end of the above extract—a classification of labourers. It is true that this

does exist practically even now, and that the spirit of emulation is by no means left without fuel because the exact daily wage of good and bad is the same. Workmen, as we have just noticed, are already divided into those who can and those who cannot command regular employment. And this distinction *ought* to be sufficient to obviate that demoralisation of the better class which Mr. Frampton complains of. But it might be better, in the interest of all parties, if some classification could be agreed upon, so as, at one and the same time, to save the farmer from paying more than its value for inferior labour, and the labourer from all the miseries of a precarious income. The difficulties in the way of such a scheme seem, indeed, insuperable; as, for instance, who would have to determine to which class an individual belonged? and would not the decision be found ultimately to depend upon the plenty or scarcity of labour? Still, such a scheme, if practicable, would doubtless be the solution of a difficulty which presses hard on both employer and employed.

Both Mr. Fraser and the gentleman from whom we have just quoted, Mr. Frampton, seem to think that a monthly hiring, with a month's notice, would be preferable to either the weekly or the yearly system; but the latter contends that it would not secure the farmer from being deserted by his men just, perhaps, when he wanted them most. The monthly hiring would, doubtless, relieve the workman from a good deal of uncertainty; and it would possess the still greater advantage of being unconnected with a system which is a standing provocation to a change of situations, the statute fair; but it certainly would be open to the objection raised by Mr. Frampton. It would be

too short a term for the indispensable men, the carter, ploughman, etc., where these have been used to yearly hiring; and though to the ordinary day labourer it would give greater certainty of employment, one does not see that it would in any way facilitate classification.

Piecework is applicable to only certain kinds of agricultural labour, and at certain seasons of the year.¹ If several men are employed upon the same job they are all paid the sum agreed upon when it is finished, though some of them may have worked a great deal harder at it than others. The "shirker," therefore, gets his advantage out of it as much as out of day-work. And it is not conducive to the domestic economy of the cottager to have lump sums coming in at irregular periods, instead of the fixed weekly wages. On the other hand, it enables the farmer to apply his labour most advantageously to himself, to get work done quickly, and, *on the whole*, it is more capable than the day system of giving its reward to merit. Mr. Culley thinks that piecework entails physical injury upon men ignorant of the laws of health, and how to exert their strength to the best advantage.

The general conclusion seems to be that, of all the existing customs which are capable of general adoption, the weekly system is open to the fewest objections. The evils which belong to it do not seem so inherent and ineradicable as those which belong to the yearly system; while the good which is effected by the latter is more than counterbalanced by the mischief. Of the monthly system we have at present too little experience to speak

¹ See Appendix.

with confidence. And the piecework system must always continue to be exceptional.

Statute fairs have still their advocates; and it is certainly possible that by stricter supervision a different character might be imparted to them, and that they might in time become as innocent festivities as the village feast. Some efforts have already been made in this direction; but hitherto they have been few and far between, and the statty, upon the whole, we should fear, with less of its original utility, retains most of its original licence. To lovers of old customs, however, who can for the moment put morals in the background, these scenes are not without a certain charm. All along the roads in the vicinity of the market town appointed for the ceremony, the young men and women of the neighbourhood are to be seen trooping along in their best clothes, and congregating eventually in the market-place, where they stand for hire like the labourers in the parable. The candidates indicate by a badge the peculiar service which they seek. The shepherd decorates his cap with a bunch of wool; the carter with a bit of whipcord; the housemaid with a sprig of broom; and both sexes alike, when they have been hired, pin a knot of bright-coloured ribbons on the breast or shoulder, just as if they were "a-going for soldiers." When the business of the day is over, the evening is devoted to amusement—in other words, dancing and drinking, which produce their natural results, and are to a large extent accountable for that low standard of female honour which, according to Mr. Fraser, is characteristic of the English peasantry. The servants like the system, of course, because it gives them, at all events, one good outing in the year.

The farmers like it, because, as they say, "they get a lot to pick from," and can compare the thews and sinews of a great many candidates for service before finally engaging one. We do not mean, of course, that they feel them over as they would a horse, or as their wives would thumb a couple of fowls; but they scan them critically, as the slave merchant would have scanned a negro, and naturally regard them in no other light than that of animals. It must be understood, however, that we are speaking only of one class of farmers who stick to the old road. We are aware that there are many others of a wholly distinct character, who dislike the system as much as anyone can, and would willingly abolish it could they find any practical substitute.

This, however, is what it is very difficult to find. Mr. Portman, in Yorkshire, heard the system generally condemned as the source of much immorality, but observed that it was so deeply rooted that it would take many years and much trouble to establish anything in its place. Mr. Stanhope, on the contrary, insists that the statute fair is no necessary part of the system of yearly hiring; and that in Cheshire, where the system is universal, the fairs have been abolished. Mr. Henley, Mr. H. Tremeneere, and Mr. Portman seem to look with hope to some intermediate course, namely, the reformation of the system, and its subjection to more refining influences. In many towns rooms have been provided to insure the separation of the sexes. In one town the clergyman tried the experiment of providing tea and coffee for the girls, but they declined to come in without the men; and both alike seemed to prefer the open air. The most efficacious reformer of the staty promises to be

the railway, as the men and women are gradually falling into the habit of going and returning by train ; in which case half the mischief of the evening revel, and all the dangers of the walk home through dark lanes and lonely fields, are averted. On the degrading effect of men and women standing to be looked at like cattle, and selected only upon physical grounds, the Commissioners are not all agreed. Mr. Norman and Mr. Stanhope condemn it strongly. Mr. Henley and Mr. H. Tremenheere see less harm in it. The former quotes the opinion of Sir C. Anderson, to the effect that there is nothing more degrading in the practice than in the examination of recruits for the arms, or the selection of men for a racing-boat. Where physical strength and activity are required, such inspection he considers indispensable.

Both Mr. Henley's and Mr. Tremenheere's experience is drawn, however, from the northern counties, which seem, as we have said, to supply exceptions to all rules. But what Mr. Henley says himself upon the subject is undoubtedly of much weight.

"Hiring fairs in Northumberland and Durham are of two kinds, for hinds and single servants ; the former are hired for the year, the latter for six months. The hiring fairs for hinds usually take place about March, the service commencing on the 12th of May.

"Nothing can be more important to a man than hiring himself for a year. He must ascertain the house he will be compelled to occupy with his family, the character of master and steward, and what the wages are to be for himself and family.

He is more likely to ascertain this in an open market, where he sells his only produce, his labour, than in any other way. The labour of every member of his family must also be taken into account. No register office would supply the information of an open market."

This view of the case is strongly corroborated by Mr. Tremenheere. In the open market the labourer meets his "master," and the characters of the various masters form the subject of free discussion. An amusing instance of this is given by the last-named Commissioner. "I shall inquire into your character," said a farmer to a man who offered himself for hire, "and you shall know my decision in the afternoon." At the appointed hour the man reappeared, and addressing the farmer who desired to engage him, said: "Since I saw you this morning I have inquired into *your* character, and my decision is to have nothing more to do with you." But the fact is, to repeat it for the third or fourth time, the condition of the North is exceptional. The demand for labour exceeds the supply; and the consequence is that the labourer is master of the position. It is curiously illustrative of this condition, that what the labourer looks to first in the farmer with whom he is in treaty is not what wages he gives, but whether he is good-tempered and keeps "a liberal table."

Moreover, the two last-named Commissioners evidently look with an indulgent eye on the statute fair, as one of the few opportunities of amusement which the poor possess, and of which we ought not too hastily to deprive them. "Personal observation at several fairs," says Mr. Henley, "did not impress

me with anything objectionable; but the usual enjoyments of race-meetings, flower-shows, etc., were making many very happy faces." Well, this is kindly said; and we honour Mr. Henley for his sympathy with these poor people, "whose long life of labour is so seldom cheered up with a gleam of sunshine." Still, these relaxations may be bought at too high a price; and whatever be the case in Cumberland, where the women, it seems, have little to lose, there can be no doubt that the price is a high one elsewhere. There is more force in the argument, that where there's a will there's a way; that is to say, that if they don't have their statute fair, the young men and women will devise some equivalent for it. They would come to the market-place on market day, it is said, and that would be just as bad.

The passion for dress and dancing, which prevails to an extraordinary extent among the canny daughters of the North, goes some way to explain the attachment of the peasantry to the "mop." Incredible as it may sound to Southern ears, a day labourer in Cumberland, who calls himself too poor to pay the school pence for the education of his children, would feel himself disgraced if he neglected his contribution to the itinerant dancing-master. The young ladies themselves carry their savings on their backs; and the result of a year's pinching is seen at the statty ball, when a girl, whose ordinary attire is wooden clogs and a serge petticoat, turns out in white muslin, a wreath of flowers, and white kid boots and gloves. It seems, too, from the customs which prevail in the North, that *there*, at all events, the abolition of the mop or statute fair

would have no influence upon morals. At the expiration of every engagement, chiefly, we suppose, the half-yearly ones, occurs what is called "a term"—that is, a week at Whitsuntide and Martinmas, when "there is an almost total suspension of agricultural labour throughout these counties." At present, it is in these weeks that the statute fairs are held; but if these were abolished, the holiday would still remain; prizes for athletic sports would continue to be given by enterprising publicans, and the morning's performance would, as now, be followed by "the ball."

Against the combination of the *utile* and the *dulce* which the statty thus presents, register-offices have as yet waged an ineffectual war. The best suggestion on the subject which has yet been made appears in the Report of Mr. Portman, wherein it is suggested that the schoolmaster in every village should keep the register. Such a system, however, presupposes that the young people in each village are willing to remain at home, which even, *cæteris paribus*, we don't believe to be the case, though in the case of district schools, such as we may have in future, the scheme would probably be successful. Mr. Thomas, the clergyman of Warmsworth, near Doncaster, says that he had himself extemporised a kind of registry which answered very well indeed. He used to leave lists of boys and girls wanting places at the principal shops in Doncaster, so that the farmers from the whole neighbourhood used to apply to him. But how many clergymen could afford time for this? He adds, that if you did it solely for the girls it would be sufficient, as the young men at the "statties," without the women, "behave tolerably

steadily." We can believe it; but the effectual and permanent separation of the two is beyond the power of authority.

There is a general complaint that, in the engagement of their servants, the farmers do not pay sufficient attention to character. Mr. Stanhope thinks it grievous that cheese, rather than chastity, should be looked to in a Cheshire dairymaid. Mr. H. Tremenheere thinks the farmers less particular than they ought to be. Mr. Portman says that they seem unaware that they are in duty bound to take some interest in the moral condition of their servants. In hiring them they look exclusively to physical considerations. He adds that, in this respect, things have got much worse than they used to be. It seems that twenty-five years ago, in parts of Yorkshire, the farmers used to hire their lads on the understanding that they were to go to church, but the custom has completely died out; and this because of the resistance of the boys, over whom, it seems, their masters have, year by year, possessed less and less influence and authority.

At this point, however, the question divides itself into two parts — the extent to which character should be taken into consideration at the time of hiring, and the extent to which good conduct ought to be enforced afterwards. The latter question, no doubt, is one which every farmer must answer according to his conscience. But it is easy to see that his material interests suffer by his not requiring some testimony to character from the servant whom he hires at a fair. For instance, take the evidence of Mr. Frampton, to whom we owe so much already. "Last Michaelmas," says he, "I hired

a carter by the month. He stayed till the days got out, made some frivolous excuse, and gave me notice. I said, 'What! throw yourself out of a place, and me out of a servant!' 'Oh,' he said, 'I have a better place, and more money.'" Now it is evident that this man could never have behaved in this way if every employer made a point of demanding a written character from the last place. The tendency of servants "to better themselves," as they call it, without the slightest regard to the interest of their masters, of which farmers so bitterly complain, would be effectually restrained by this practice—a practice, too, which it is in their own power to set in action to-morrow.

As to requiring testimonials to morality, we don't exactly see how these could work. It is the business of a dairymaid to make cheese, as it is of a ploughman to make furrows. And the farmer, who has to live by his cows or by his corn, can hardly be expected not to make proficiency in those arts his primary object. We should be sorry to treat so serious a subject with anything like levity or ridicule, but the complaint about the dairymaids reminds us irresistibly of the advertisements for a pious lodger, or a Christian butler, which one occasionally sees in the press.

At the same time, if masters would combine together, so that girls who had met with "misfortunes" found themselves experiencing every year greater difficulties in getting employed, it cannot be doubted that vice would be materially checked, though at some hardship to individuals. It is questionable, however, whether the morality of female farm-servants is so very much below that of others, as we should be led to infer from these Reports. Ladies have no time to

make searching inquiries into the past life of every housemaid they engage. If anything improper comes to the knowledge of the mistress while the girl is in her service, the former is bound, of course, to take notice of it in any character which she may hereafter be called upon to give her. But even if we suppose that this obligation is always respected, it is certain that a good deal of immorality does prevail among domestic servants which eludes the knowledge of their employers, even where "misfortunes" follow. And if an inferior master takes less trouble about the character of a servant who is not a family servant than a superior master takes about the character of one who is, that is perhaps the whole of the difference.

Statute fairs might possibly be reformed, much in the same way in which, in many parts of England, village feasts and harvest-homes have been reformed. These festivals were at one time scenes of great excess, and the former of them, at least, one of some profligacy. But through the exertions of the clergy and other well-disposed persons, both have lost their worst features, and have become, the one a decent, the other even a pious institution. If statute fairs we still must have, why should not some regular and respectable entertainment be provided for the youngsters, and the evening dance be held under the auspices of the parish clergyman? Another generation would soon grow up to whom the rough romping and swinish merriment¹ of the present system would seem as abominable as the spectacle of half-a-dozen gentlemen of birth under the dining-room table would seem to ourselves. Lastly,

¹ Written thirty years ago.

although the conditions of agricultural service make it less the interest of the farmer to inquire into the character of his servants, yet to do so to a certain extent is manifestly to his own advantage; while he ought not to object to being told that of the young people living under his own roof he is bound by every tie which binds society together to consult both the moral and religious welfare. If he regards his servants only as so many "hands," like the work-people in a factory, he is violating, certainly, no law of political economy, but he is throwing away the advantages of the situation in which Providence has placed him, and neglecting to do the good which he *can* do, and which the majority of mill-owners cannot.

CHAPTER VII

PUBLICAN AND POACHER

I HAVE left the chapter on public-houses and poaching pretty much as they originally stood, with only such slight alterations as, for instance, the Ground Game Act of 1881 have made necessary; and the following remarks on field sports may now be added, seeing that one of the great evils to which they were conducive has now been reduced to much smaller proportions than it boasted half a century ago, while the value of field sports as a training for the camp and the battlefield has been much more generally recognised. They have been called "a survival of barbarism." But so is war; and while we have the one we cannot afford to dispense with the other. Field sports encourage hardihood quicken our powers of observation, and demand from their votaries both presence of mind and readiness of resource. Neither do the peasantry, as a rule, regard them with aversion. The real enemies of field sports come from a different quarter and belong to a different class. The agricultural labourer, when he snares a rabbit or a hare, knows perfectly well that he would never get one at all if the squire was no longer a sportsman, and gave up game preserving. Law-breaking is no doubt demoralising; but the public-house has a good deal to answer for in the matter of poaching,

especially in the rural districts. And the two together may very well make one chapter.

A vice which is condemned by public opinion, and exposed, whenever it shows itself, to either unfeigned ridicule or unfeigned indignation, is, we may be sure, a doomed vice; for very few natures are really callous to the opinion of the world, and still fewer are strong enough to maintain a course of steady hypocrisy, so as to conceal their defiance of it. But there are two kinds of public opinion, one of which is the result of a deep moral conviction, while the other is only, as it were, an opinion *de convenance*—a kind of general understanding in the interest of social decorum. The influence of the latter is of course only superficial, and confined to those circles whose comfort it is found to promote. The influence of the former is felt everywhere, and extends to the abstract evil of vicious habits as well as to the public inconvenience of them. The one kind of opinion, however, is frequently mistaken for the other; and we are not sure that this is not sometimes the case when the vice of drunkenness is discussed. Drinking to excess is now discountenanced in good society, and to enter a drawing-room drunk would be as bad as to enter it naked. Yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we shall confess it is very doubtful if this general unanimity on the subject springs from any deeper disapproval of sensuality in the abstract than was entertained by our forefathers. It is simply a matter of good taste. The spectacle of intoxication has become unpleasant: a better educated and more accomplished generation has other resources than the bottle; health is thought a great deal more of. But it would be rash to assert, dogmatically, that, if less

coarse in our lives than the generation which preceded us, we are not at least equally voluptuous.

Now those classes in society who have not made the like progress in refinement have an instinctive perception of this truth. They are not to be taken in. Sobriety, they see, is the fashion; and those who aspire to be fashionable, endeavour to be sober. But we greatly doubt if the feeling goes deeper than this. And as soon as we come down to a class which is wholly unaffected by such considerations we see the vice as rampant as ever. If it is a little on the decline in some places, it has gained ground in others. And the difficulty of dealing with it by any other means alone makes the improved education of the poor a matter of paramount importance. But we hope we shall give no offence by saying that, even *with* an improved system of education, the labouring classes will scarcely be weaned from this habit as long as the class just above them continues to indulge it. With a certain class of farmers and tradesmen the brandy-bottle is still in daily requisition, and they are seldom seen absolutely sober after dinner. Their men overhear them joking each other on the subject; and if one of them has tumbled into the ditch coming home from market, or met with any other humorous incident of the same kind under the influence of Bacchus, he is the hero of the hour. The labouring man may see that drinking is a bad game—that it impoverishes his family and impairs his strength; but he will never entertain that rooted aversion to it which is necessary to any real reformation while he sees his betters either continue to practise it themselves, or to regard it only as an amiable weakness in their neighbours.

And here it may be as well to state that there is

much in the private lives, as well as in the business, of both farmers and tradespeople, which Commissioners and clergymen do not very readily get at. The former, as a rule, come in contact with only the better class of farmers. From the latter, of course, excesses are to some extent concealed. It would be absurd to deny that there is a very numerous and growing class of tenant-farmers who might be trusted to drink with a bishop, and are as much alive to the grossness of the vice of intoxication as the greatest gentleman in St. James'. But it is equally undeniable that between these and the labourers there is another very large class of whom as much cannot certainly be said, who continue to look upon drunkenness as a way that men have, and one of those ambiguous habits which, as they cannot be suppressed, ought to be made to yield as much fun as possible. A great allowance, therefore, should be made for the English labourer. Everything is against him: tradition, example, the proximity of the beer-shop, the custom of the country, all drag him one way, and conduct him with very little resistance to the bright hearth and social circle which await him at the "Dragon."

The respectable paterfamilias desires to meet his coevals, and to discuss the news of the village, and perhaps a bit of politics, in quite a decent and quiet fashion. But even in doing this he spends more than he can afford and drinks more than he can bear. Little by little he gets behindhand in the world, runs in debt at the chandler's, injures his health, and at last falls an easy prey to the first illness that attacks him; whereas the money spent at the public-house, laid out upon warm clothes and more substantial food, would have enabled him, with an unimpaired

constitution, to weather any ordinary disease. No doubt these habits of tipping are encouraged by the multiplication of public-houses, for the more competition there is, the more important a personage does each customer become. But it would probably be impossible at the present day to effect any such reduction in the number of beer-shops as would make an appreciable impression upon the vice of drunkenness. Mr. Stanhope calls attention "to the feeling which everywhere exists as to the necessity of limiting the number of beer-houses, obtaining more control over them, and of transferring their supervision to some more competent authority"; but adds: "For my own part, I look with far more confidence to the effect which will be produced by an improvement in the condition of the cottages, in enabling them to compete in attractiveness with the warm and well-lighted public-house. I say their condition, because some believe that this object can best be achieved by a change in their situation; that is, by placing them on the farms, where the man is further removed from temptation. In the same way other landowners have endeavoured to check the evil by not permitting any public-house to be opened in the village of which they are sole proprietors. I cannot speak very highly of the success of these attempts. A drunkard will drink in spite of the trifling obstacle of distance; and considerable injustice is caused to others, who are charged an exorbitant price for the poisonous liquor which is sold to them as beer."¹

We quite agree with this opinion; but at the same time we think some reduction might be made in the number of *public-houses*, and that shops for the sale

¹ See Appendix V.

of beer, in any quantity, not to be drunk on the premises, might advantageously be substituted for them, if the law were strictly carried out, as we see no reason why it should not be. It is not an uncommon thing nowadays to see two public-houses, or veritable inns, in a village of four hundred people. They cannot both be wanted. They never could have been in villages which lie among the lanes remote from the chief lines of traffic; while even in those which lie on turnpike roads they cannot be required now, whatever they might have been once. Before the introduction of railways, when goods were still conveyed by waggon, and still earlier, when journeys were performed on horseback, the village inn, with the great elm tree and horse-trough in front of it, and the rambling old stables in the rear, was not merely a picturesque antiquity, but one of the necessities of life. Nowadays, the only useful purpose which it serves is to accommodate the village club at its annual dinner and its monthly meetings, or to pick up a stray guest when the parsonage happens to be full. At all events, if it does more than this, *two* such houses are not wanted in any one rural parish. Accordingly, if in each village there was only one place where people could meet and drink together, while, for the sake of competition, shops were licensed to sell beer exclusively for home consumption, and vigilantly watched by the police to see that this condition was observed, one great step would have been taken towards the diminution of drunkenness.

The next is the improvement of cottages. But as this point has been discussed already, we shall pass on to the third—the quality of beer sold. The only

one of the Commissioners who has made a point of this is Mr. Norman, but it yields in importance to none of the influences by which the sobriety of the labourer is affected. The abominable mixtures which are sold for beer in many village inns not only stimulate instead of quenching thirst, but are so concocted as to produce immediate stupefaction. The peasant who goes in for his half-pint of beer on his way home—no very heinous crime, surely—feels, when he has swallowed it, just as if he had been drugged, sits down helplessly in a corner, and continues to drink almost mechanically—with what result may be imagined; or even if he does not do that, the small quantity he has taken has such an effect upon him that if his master or the clergyman meets him between the public-house and his cottage, he fancies him intoxicated, and forthwith registers him as drunkard. The natural result of giving the dog a bad name ensues, and one more character is gone.

The keepers of these houses have been known to lament the necessity which compelled them to vend such stuff. But they have no choice. The house is a close house; that is to say, it belongs to some small brewer in the neighbouring market town, and the publican is little more than his agent. In London we believe the adulteration of beer mostly begins in the public-house; elsewhere it is completed in the brewery. Mr. Norman says that any new Act of Parliament, of which the object is to check intemperance, should deal with the article sold as well as with the person selling it. And even now it is difficult to understand why the adulteration of beer cannot be detected and punished as easily as the adulteration of bread. The fact, however, remains that little or no effort ever is

made to bring home this offence to the perpetrator.¹ And in default of any enactment to facilitate the punishment of the criminal, we should say the only way to help the poor is to destroy the profits of the crime. To save them from drinking bad beer we must provide them with the means of getting better. Such was the opinion of Mr. Culley (Rep. II., 93): "I do not for a moment desire that the labourer should be denied every facility for quenching his thirst in beer; on the contrary, I should like to see beer sold across every counter with as little restriction as bread and butter, save only that it should not be drunk on the premises. I would confine the licence to sell beer to be drunk on the premises to that class of houses which are also licensed to sell spirits. Under such a system a man would probaby take home to his family only so much beer as he could conveniently pay for, and as they could consume without injury, and he would be robbed of the temptations to excess which it is the business of the beer-house keeper to provide."

A fourth suggestion is, that the poor should be encouraged to brew at home. But to waive all questions of economy, and all questions of Excise, we, in common with most persons who know the poor well, are convinced they would never take the trouble.² They have got used to the beer-shop, and they will never go back to the brew-house. We have no doubt that if they could be persuaded to do it, it would be attended with the most beneficial consequences, as plenty of middle-aged men, who remember

¹ See Appendix V., p. 158.

² Since this was written I have seen some reason to modify this opinion.—T. E. K., 1887.

the system in operation, are ready to demonstrate. A farmer in the South, not more than five-and-forty years of age, assured the present writer that when he was a lad of seventeen there was not a public-house in his native village, or within some miles of it; that every family down the village street brewed their barrel of beer periodically; and that the inhabitants used to meet at each cottage in turn, from six to eight o'clock in the evening, and play at cards for apples till the cask was emptied, when they went on to the next house. Drunkenness, he said, was unknown on these occasions; and, from an intimate knowledge of the man, I am sure that he was not romancing. But this Arcadian state of innocence has passed away never to return. The knowledge of good and evil has come in the form of a public-house; and Eden cannot be recovered. We don't believe, then, that even if the malt-tax were repealed the poor could be induced to brew at home, and we dismiss the suggestion as impracticable.

The four suggestions then, by compliance with which intoxication, it is hoped, might be diminished, are as follows:—The requisition of a certificate for all licences; the reduction of the number of houses where liquor is drunk on the premises; the encouragement of others where it is not, under strict securities for the observance of the law; the improvement of cottages, so as to give the peasant all his comforts at home; and finally, if possible, the rigorous enforcement of penalties laid down by law against all adulteration of beer.

All the Commissioners alike, however, comment on the well-known fact that no business can be transacted in the country without beer. Every bargain must be

wetted, and all sorts of odd jobs are just as often remunerated in liquor as in cash. If you want a lad to run an errand, "Tom or Jack'll do it, sir, for a pint o' beer, I daresay," is the answer to your inquiry. And so strong is the tradition that, even if he didn't spend the threepence in liquor, he would still call it, "a pint o' beer." Generally speaking, however, he would scorn to spend it on anything else, whether he was thirsty or not. It is this general belief in drink as the *τὸ ἀριστον* which it is so exceedingly difficult to eradicate from the working class. A holiday with them means drink; a legacy with them means more and better drink. A gentleman is one who can always get the best to drink; a lady is one who gracefully asks you if you won't drink. All festivals are failures without drink. When a groom has carried a message, or a keeper delivered some game, he is instantly asked, on his return, did he drink? In fact, the idea of drink is interwoven with every action of their lives, and follows them from their cradle to their grave like a religion. This genial superstition is not to be uprooted in a day; nor will it even be shaken among the peasantry until it has disappeared among the farmers. As long as it meets with any kind of recognition, either at their hands or at the hands of a class yet above them, it will continue to flourish like an evergreen.

From public-houses to poaching the transition is a very simple one. The Ground Game Act, however, of 1881, has so far diminished the number of hares and rabbits, that poaching has become a poor business compared with what it was fifty years ago. But it is not on its temptations to crime that the preservation of game is now denounced. It is now a political cry:

Another of the stalking horses, behind which a shot can be got at the county families. The exact amount of demoralisation among the English peasantry with which poaching is chargeable it is not very easy to calculate; but the most demoralising form of it is directly encouraged by the beer-shop. Roughly speaking, poachers may be divided into three kinds: There is first (so thinks the Cockney) the starving peasant, who steals a rabbit to provide his family with a meal; secondly, the professional gang, who supply the poulterer and fishmonger, and who, in the great lottery of crime, have simply drawn hares and pheasants, instead of bank-notes and jewels; and thirdly, the idle scamp, who is to be found in all villages, who snares and shoots on the sly, and drinks out his booty at the public-house. Now, the first of these is a simple myth, notwithstanding the sympathy which has been showered upon him by philanthropists whose zeal outruns their knowledge. The second are not peculiar to the country; and indeed, the larger and more formidable gangs are usually recruited from the towns. But of course they use the country public-houses of the worst sort, such as have thriven since 1863, which frequently combine together to form a kind of fund from which the poachers' expenses, in the way of fines, loss of implements, etc., are defrayed. Here, of course, they come in contact with the village population, and naturally with the worst effects.

But, after all, we have reason to believe it is the facilities for disposing of a single hare or pheasant afforded by these houses, which are the greatest incentives to poaching among the agricultural poor, and teach many a lad to poach who would never have thought

of it otherwise. Excessive preservation is not essential to this kind of poaching, and yet of all kinds it is the most demoralising. Egg-stealing is one form of poaching which has, no doubt, a bad effect on rustic morals. But on carefully-preserved estates every nest is watched, and if the eggs are taken, the theft is sure to be known, and the thief is sure to be suspected. Labourers may steal eggs on outlying or non-preserved farms; but if they do it where the farmer himself shoots they run a greater risk than they do even from the gamekeeper. So that, after all, the field of operations open to the egg-stealer is considerably narrowed, and the demoralisation which it causes must be very partial.

As for saying that game is a temptation to the peasantry, the fallacy involved in the assertion is so obvious, and yet so generally accepted, that it may be worth while to examine it with some care. The thesis is that the Game Laws are injurious to the morals of the people; therefore they ought to be abolished. This bare statement, however, implies the existence of a syllogism of which the major premiss is this—that all things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. It is plain either that this cannot be the case, or that the principle of property is a vicious one. For all property is a temptation, and all temptations are injurious to the morals of the people. By the common consent of mankind, therefore, we may assume that our major premiss is to be negatived. We then descend to a particular affirmative—some things which are injurious to the morals of the people ought to be abolished. Very good; but what things? Generally, we may say that all things which are both

immoral in themselves, and exist only for the sake of immorality, ought to be abolished. In this list would come gambling-houses and brothels. Then we come to things which are immoral in themselves, but of which the object or final cause is not immoral, such as bribery at elections; for there is no immorality in being a member of Parliament. And thirdly, we may come to things which, though not immoral in themselves, do nevertheless conduce to immorality, such as public-houses. Now it is clear that Game Laws come under neither of the first two heads. They are not immoral in the abstract. We have to consider them, then, as they come under the third—things which, in themselves innocent, conduce in their effects to vice.

But we now find ourselves face to face with a very simple formula which it is common to apply to such cases; we mean the use and the abuse of things. And we set the one against the other. As De Quincey points out, the much-maligned science of casuistry is nevertheless in universal operation in the affairs of the world. We are always obliged to make cases. Now, in this instance, we can lay down no principle. We can only say that, wherever the abuse exceeds the use, palpably, grossly, and to such an extent as almost to override and extinguish it, then such things should be abolished. Common-sense is the only tribunal by which this point can be determined. We consider that in this respect the public-house question is closely analogous to the Game Law question. Both are temptations to vice. But on the other hand, it is contended that both serve other purposes, which are not only innocent, but in the one case necessary, and in the other

salutary; of which the evil they do by the temptations they hold out is not enough to justify the suppression. On broad grounds it may be added that, as all classes of mankind are exposed to their particular temptations in the path of life, the poor must expect to have theirs; and that this system of removing all temptations *because they are* temptations is inconsistent with the theory of moral discipline, and the formation of virtuous habits.

A word or two, in conclusion, of what is called "Justices' justice" in its relation to poaching. We constantly see convictions which have been obtained before country magistrates made the subject of very severe animadversion in the London press, and there are two observations which we desire to make upon the subject. One is this—that there is a border-land between the professional poacher and the honest labourer, if not so wide as it used to be, still much wider than skirts any other criminal profession; and that the existence of this border-land is a source of great perplexity to magistrates. If a man is caught picking a pocket, or breaking into a house, or swindling by an assumed name, or anything of that kind, he is pretty sure to be a regular professional criminal. But the man who snares a rabbit is not equally sure to be a professional poacher. He is on the high road to become one; that is certain. But he may have done it for the fun of the thing; or from an idea of its cleverness; or merely from a lawless disposition in general. But there is very great difficulty in distinguishing between a man of this class and a confirmed offender; and probably hardly anyone can do it but those who live upon the spot, and have constant opportunities of observing him.

This is one reason why the evidence of gamekeepers and the decision of local magistrates have often more in them than meets the eye of the general public. This is a point in their favour. There is, secondly, one that tells against them in just about an equal degree. Between gamekeepers and poachers, and especially such poachers as oftenest come before the magistrates, there is a much more bitter feeling than exists between officers of justice in general and criminals in general. They are pitted against each other in a much more personal way; and the game which the poacher takes is what the keeper regards almost as his own. He has reared it and tended it early and late, and has an interest in it which it is quite impossible a policeman should feel for the stock-in-trade of a jeweller or watchmaker. Then, again, the policeman is one of a numerous and disciplined force, the lustre of whose exploits is reflected upon each member of it, whether he has done anything himself or not. But a keeper has his *own* reputation either to make or to maintain. What keepers in general may do affects not him. *He* would be thought none the better of, though a keeper in the adjoining county had taken twenty poachers single-handed. Consequently, there is generally a tendency, kept in check, or developed, according to the character of the master, on the part of keepers, to make business, and to demonstrate their own activity. Gentlemen should always be upon their guard against this very natural weakness of human nature; for sure we are that in the feuds upon the subject of game which agitate most rural districts it plays a most important part, and is at the bottom of many of the crimes which are mostly charged against the Game Laws.

CHAPTER VIII

AIDS TO THE LABOURER—BENEFIT SOCIETIES— CO-OPERATIVE FARMS—STORES

THAT benefit societies are frequently the reverse of beneficial to the unfortunate labourers who belong to them is what everyone is now aware of. But still the principle itself seems sound enough, and, if the machinery were amended, they would be properly included among the ameliorating circumstances of agricultural life. At the present time they seem to have gone altogether wrong. They do that which they ought not to do, and leave undone that which they ought to do; they squander their money upon beer, and repudiate their just debts; they lead a jolly life for a few years, and as soon as the necessity of meeting their original engagements begins to threaten them, they are dissolved, and the funds evenly divided. The young members join another club. But what becomes of the old men, who had pinched themselves for many years to secure a provision for their old age? This selfish and dishonest practice is so general throughout the country as to have caused the Commissioners to report most unfavourably of the operation of benefit societies.¹

¹ We must again remind our readers that this was written in another generation. How far the promised Legislation on the subject of Old Age Pensions will affect the Benefit Societies is yet to be seen.

The Commissioners differ, however, a good deal in regard to the details of these institutions. Some think that the annual celebration, with its procession, its banners, its sermon, and its dinner, simply entails drunkenness and waste of funds, and that it ought to be abolished. Mr. Stanhope thinks, on the contrary, that these things are so great an attraction, and form so strong an inducement to the labourer to join a club, that, if we think it good for him to do so, we ought not to discourage them. We must say we think it doubtful how far the advocates of the opposite view come into court with clean hands. The intimate connection which exists in England between charity and conviviality is so old a joke that we can now refer to it without joking: and if rich people, whose life is one long holiday, or men of business, whose evenings are devoted to enjoyment, find it necessary to keep up the system of public dinners, and so forth, we scarcely know what to say to the clubbists of a country village. Their annual dinners are not very expensive, and are usually tolerably decorous. And when we consider that to the majority of the members roast veal and batter pudding are viands too delicious almost to be realised, which they only taste once a year, and which they are actually paying for with their own money, we may easily forgive them a little boisterousness of animal spirits. And surely, if such dinners must be eaten, it is better that the clergyman of the parish should preside at them than that he shouldn't. Mr. Stanhope, while allowing the good policy of the dinner, apparently condemns the practice of its being preceded by a sermon, and being shared in by the preacher. He says that the club threaten the clergy-

man that they will go to the Dissenting chapel if he won't give them a service in the church, and that very few can "resist this pressure." It is like saying "Puss, puss" when the dog won't eat his dinner, as a late Archbishop of Canterbury once observed of a similar kind of pressure. But if the whole ceremonial of which the sermon is a part meets with Mr. Stanhope's approval, why should the clergy require any pressure? He is, however, perhaps right in saying that before lending their countenance to the meeting of the club, they ought to know something of its circumstances, and not to give the prestige of their attendance to a rotten or fraudulent concern. At the same time, this is easier said than done. Such bodies are very jealous of interference; and unless the club has been founded by the clergyman or the squire in person, it would be difficult to obtain the necessary information.

The connection between clubs and public-houses is not, however, confined to the annual dinner, which usually takes place on Whit-Monday; it is kept up throughout the year by monthly meetings, in favour of which nothing can be said. These meetings are held for the purpose of receiving subscriptions; and every member, on payment of his monthly 1s. 6d., is entitled to a pint of beer out of the club funds. But in some cases the practice goes much beyond this—as many pints of beer being drawn as there are members of the club, and the members present being entitled to consume it all. At a club in Bedfordshire, conducted upon this system, it was stated to Mr. Culley that the average monthly expenditure on beer alone was £1 7s. 8d. One rule of this club was attended by a comic result. A considerable sum of club money was always left in charge of

the landlord for the purpose of paying the sick members, etc. On one occasion the box was missing, and, after a search, was found in one of the landlord's fields, with all the money gone, but the papers all safe, and among them the guarantee given by the landlord for the safety of the cash. Whether he was obliged to make it good or not doesn't appear. At the same club the proceedings at club funerals were so scandalous that it became necessary at last to limit the attendance to the stewards.

Several causes, however, seem combining to extinguish this system. Young men are beginning to find out the superior advantages of larger societies—such as Oddfellows, Foresters, etc.—and the old public-house club is growing daily less popular. Landowners, too, are beginning to take them into their own hands, and to compel the observance of better rules; while, “as the present Government have undertaken to bring in a Bill to enable the Post Office to grant insurances on life for £5, there is now, I think, no need of a burial fund, or, still better, of burial societies; and as the Post Office Savings Bank and Government annuities are everywhere at hand to give a good account of the investment of a labourer's savings, there remains only the need of a sickness club” (Culley, Rep. II., p. 92).

But wherever clubs are still kept up, it seems most desirable that they should supply the labourer with the means of making provision for his family after his own death. At present, as a rule, they secure him a weekly allowance during sickness, and after he is past work; they cheapen his doctor's bill, and they pay for his funeral. But there they stop. And as Mr. Portman well puts it: “Take the case of a

man who never had a day's illness in his life; he makes the monthly payment to his club for many years, and at his death there is a sum given for his funeral, but all the hard-earned savings of his life having been paid into the club, are lost to his family." Of course it is these men who pay for the others, and all take their chance alike when they join the club. But this does not make it any better for the particular sufferers; and several associations are now in existence whose object it is to meet this objection, and to secure a fund for the benefit of widows and children of deceased members. Some of these have been started by private individuals — as the Wiltshire Friendly Society, started by Mr. Sotheron Estcourt; the North Warwickshire, by Sir C. Adderley; and a society in Oxfordshire, by Captain Dashwood. Besides these, the Commissioners mention many other societies, in various parts of England, which carry out the same principle by grafting on to the ordinary business of benefit societies the system of deposits, *e.g.*, the Hampshire Friendly Society, whose rules about deposits are as follows :

"1. The members receive back annually to their own private account or deposit, also called their Rest, whatever sums remain over from the common sick fund, after providing for the above objects, of sick, old age, and medical allowance; and they thus have all the advantages of a sharing club, without its risks.

"2. They may pay in to their own deposit or Rest any further sum they please, as into a savings bank.

"3. They may withdraw any sum they please from their deposit, as from a savings bank.

"4. Deposits receive interest, as in the Post Office Savings Bank.

"5. The balance of the deposit remaining at a member's death is paid to whomsoever he appoints."

The mere fact that labouring men are able to belong to these clubs and at the same time to pay 3d. or 4d. a week to the village Clothing Club, shows that after all they cannot be in that condition of abject poverty which is too commonly supposed to be their lot. Several of the Commissioners appear to think that they would use these clubs even more than they do, if it were not for the influence of the Poor Law. Many deserving and industrious labourers, says Mr. Stanhope, appear to be discouraged from making the effort to secure independence by self-help from the fear of losing their presumed right to relief from the poor-rate; and the guardians have no fixed rule by which to determine such cases. Sometimes they do consider the receipt of club allowances a bar to parochial relief, and sometimes they don't. Uniformity of custom should surely be established upon this point. Mr. Norman wonders that the poor ever do practise self-denial for the sake of a maintenance in old age, when the Poor Law will give it them without, and feels sure that "this has a direct tendency to weaken those feelings of self-reliance and independence among the labouring classes, on the development of which qualities the amelioration of that class must necessarily depend." Mr. Portman (p. 165) writes to the same effect. But the problem which is raised by all three seems almost insoluble, except by abolishing the system of outdoor relief altogether.

As for going into the "House," the poor have not grown indifferent to that humiliation, and would still make sacrifices to avert it. But I don't see how it is possible to disconnect parish relief and improvidence. To tell a man to starve in the streets because he has not had sufficient self-denial to provide for his old age is to defeat the very object of the Poor Law. To say you will relieve none but those who have been provident is simply to say that you will relieve none except those who don't want it. My own experience goes to show that by a very large class of our English peasantry the shame of "coming on the parish," in any shape, is still felt. With the better education, better wages, and the better position altogether, which I trust are in store for them, this feeling may be trusted to increase. But I fear that for those who *are* capable of looking forward to parish relief with equanimity, and of making it an excuse for doing nothing to assist themselves, there is no help. As they make their bed they must lie upon it.

Several interesting experiments have been tried of late years in various parts of England, in the shape of co-operative farms, which are said to be a great success. Mr. Gurdon, of Assington Hall, in Suffolk, was the bold innovator who first conceived this idea; and finding myself recently within a few miles of his estate, I resolved to pay it a visit and judge of the system for myself. The farm was visited by Mr. Fraser in the course of his official investigations three years ago, and to him I am indebted for the first knowledge of the establishment. But the part of his Report which relates to it has not been generally noticed, and even if it had been,

it does not exhaust the subject. It must be premised that, as it is no easy matter to extort from any ordinary farmer a truthful account of his gains and losses, so in this case we found a similar indisposition to come to close quarters on the subject. And here, too, the reticence of the farmer is aggravated by the suspiciousness of the peasant; nor could I help being amused at the obvious struggle which was going on in the mind of our chief informant between his eagerness to represent the institution in as favourable a light as possible, and his reluctance to admit that the members made a great deal by it. However, the collation of different statements, and of hostile with friendly criticism, enabled us to make a pretty good guess at the financial merits of the system. But, before proceeding to discuss them, it will be better to explain to our readers exactly what the system is. It is wholly unconnected either with the small farm system or the allotment system. The members form an agricultural company, but the land is not divided among them so as to give each one a piece to himself, and, in fact, they have no more to do with its cultivation than the shareholders in a railway company have to do with its traffic. The profits are divided among them every year, and are supposed to be paid partly in money and partly in kind; but for all they have to do with the actual tillage of the land they might as well live a hundred miles off, or have their money in the Crystal Palace. Here at once is a highly important distinction between this method of improving the position of the labourer, and all those which depend upon making him an actual cultivator on his own account.

This, then, is the first point to be borne in mind.

The "co-operative farm is not intended to be a means of turning the labourer into a farmer; nor is it, except in point of money, any substitute for the allotment. The members continue what they ever were, ordinary day labourers, who work for the farmers of the parish at the ordinary weekly wages; as, indeed, they may work under their own manager on the same terms if they choose, and if out of employment, they have a preferential claim upon him. But that is all. The only farmer in the case is the paid manager, and he is little, if at all, above the rank of an ordinary peasant. He receives 12s. a week, and he is assisted by two other officials, elected annually, who play the part of directors. The manager occupies what corresponds to the farm-house upon the farm, and he and his colleagues are supposed to meet in council once a week, when questions of cropping, manuring, and what not, are, if necessary, put to the vote; but practically, the whole working of the machine is in the hands of the one man who stands in the place of the ordinary tenant-farmer. All the members are obliged to be agricultural labourers, except, as we are told, three—but as Mr. Fraser was informed, six—these being, according to one account, a blacksmith, a wheelwright, and a miller; according to the other, a shoemaker and two carpenters besides; so that the little settlement, aided as it is by a co-operative store, is complete within itself. No member is allowed to live more than three miles from the parish, to accept parish relief, or to retain his share if convicted of a felonious offence. All are obliged to belong to an approved benefit club, and the widow of a member may retain her husband's share during her own lifetime.

Assington is a pretty little retired village some distance from any railway, and lying in a thickly-wooded but rather flat country between Colchester and Sudbury. Mr. Gurdon, the representative of an old family and owner of nearly all the parish, died last November,¹ but he had not been resident for many years; and, as Mr. Fraser very truly says, the success of his scheme is due to no artificial petting or coddling. He began it as long ago as 1830, and at the present time there are two farms on the property, cultivated by two different companies—one of 133 acres and 21 members, the other of 213 acres and 36 members. The latter farm, which is the one I saw most of, lies rather exposed, and a good deal of the land was till quite recently wood. As this company, which started in 1854 with only 70 acres, has been continually taking in new land, and as the expense of grubbing up the rough land has been considerable, we were not surprised to learn that the dividend at present was a small one. It was explained to us, moreover, that the roots which remained embedded in the soil made it impossible to use the steam-plough in fields which, from their size and flatness, were otherwise admirably adapted to it, and that it would not be till the stumps had rotted that the soil could be cultivated to the greatest advantage. But the land looked very clean, and the crops healthy, nor was there anything at all of a poverty-stricken air about the whole place. The older farm, which is now fairly on its legs, is of course doing much better.

In each case the company was formed by means of a loan from the landlord, supplementing the subscriptions of the members. In each case the loan was

¹ 1870.

the same, namely, £400 ; but in the first company the subscriptions were £3 apiece, and in the second £3 10s. Both the size of the farms and the number of members have gone on increasing till they have reached the figures above given. The value of each share in the larger farm is estimated by the sum which the holder would receive if the whole stock were sold off, and that is calculated at about £30. The shares on the smaller farm, as they yield a larger income, are worth nearly £50. When a labourer buys a share he has to pay not less than £5 down, and he surrenders his proportion of the profits till the balance is discharged. The rent paid is about 30s. an acre, which is something below the average rental of the neighbourhood. These societies started, on the whole, then, under favourable circumstances. It is true that the original capital in each case was rather below the amount which is thought desirable for farming in general ; but still it seems to have been about £7 an acre ; and no interest was charged them for the money advanced. In the next place, their expenses were and are limited entirely to the necessary expenses of cultivation. There is no establishment to keep up. There is no "black-coated man," as the local phrase runs, who has a station to maintain or luxuries to purchase. The farmer or manager lives like a peasant, and nothing goes on unproductive expenditure.

Under these circumstances one is naturally very curious to know what the profits are, and how much each member really receives per annum. But this is just the point on which a good deal of secrecy is preserved. Every member gets a ton of coals, a certain number of sacks of potatoes, and one if not two fat pigs every year. But how much money is divided between

them we could not discover with exactness. The manager of the newer and larger farm, which has not yet paid its debts, gave us to understand that the money dividend from that farm was at present something inappreciable. But, on being pressed, he seemed willing to allow us to suppose that as soon as encumbrances were cleared off, and the land got into good condition, each member's receipts would go near to constitute a livelihood. We found, too, that the general opinion in the village among non-members was that a share in the old farm was worth, in money and goods, from £20 to £30 a year. These accounts, therefore, correspond pretty closely, and the inference would be that the system returns nearly three times the profits which are ordinarily assigned to agriculture. For instance, it is commonly supposed that a farmer ought to make three rents. The rent of the farm in question is £200, so that the gross receipts ought to amount to £600. But if 21 members receive £25 apiece, they divide no less a sum than £525, and the gross receipts ought to be £1,575, or nearly eight rents instead of three. Nor does the absence of carriages and hunters explain this difference; for these cannot affect the actual produce of the soil. Nor would farmers, generally speaking, who had only 130 acres, ever indulge in such luxuries if they had not private property besides. Now, by all I could learn, the land, though well enough cultivated, was not cultivated above the average standard, so as to yield a higher profit than ordinary; while, of course, many of the farmers would say it was rather below it than above.

On the whole, therefore, I should be disposed to think that the profits of the concern have been rather

magnified than diminished by the admiring peasantry of the neighbourhood, and to doubt whether, after all, the benefits of the system do more than counteract its disadvantages. Its pecuniary benefits are not, perhaps, greatly in excess of what a judicious development of the allotment system is calculated to confer. It promotes integrity by the rule already mentioned, according to which a conviction before a magistrate entails forfeiture of the share. But the allotment system is capable of being worked in this way too. It keeps down the rates. But then, under the present system, that is only a modified boon to the ratepayers, who are assessed, not by parishes, but districts. And were it generally carried out so as to equalise the rates, it would tend to the extinction of a class of men who, with all their faults, fill a place in our rural economy which we should find it very difficult to fill up, namely, the tenant-farmers. The peasantry, of course, are enraptured with the system. But it was commenced at a time when probably the allotment system was unknown in that part of England; and they contend that the dislike of it entertained by the farmer proceeds wholly from the greater independence with which it imbues the labourer. Those who participate in its benefits "won't stand being swore at, like those who don't," said one of our informants, an intelligent young fellow, who doubtless had grounds for what he said. But it is probable that the main cause of the farm's hostility lies much deeper than this—in the instinct, namely, of self-preservation, which tells him that any general adoption of the principle would be fatal to his own class. Our own conclusion, accordingly, is much the same as Mr. Fraser's. Within moderate

limits, on a scale which shall not interfere with the general system of the country, it may safely be commended. If it lacks some of the advantages of the allotment or the garden which the labourer tills with his own hands, it may be true that it gives him a more permanent interest in the soil; while, if this be desirable, "it no doubt promotes the reappearance of small farms without the reappearance of small farmers."

There is likewise at Assington a Co-operative Store, which is found to answer very well. It has at present about seventy members; and I did not find that any one spoke ill of this, except, of course, the small tradespeople in the place. The innkeeper complained that it interfered with his trade; so, doubtless, would the shopkeeper who is licensed to sell "tea, coffee, pepper, snuff, vinegar, and tobacco"; so, also, would the modern class of shops which have sprung up in villages of late, and sell clothes, boots, brushes, stationery, and so forth. But still, while vested interests should be respected—and the system should, if possible, be so gradually introduced as to avoid becoming the ruin of honest and industrious tradespeople—still, there is no objection to these stores founded on any inherent evil tendency belonging to them: and if they can provide either better or cheaper, or better and cheaper goods for the poor, than the ordinary village shop, the latter, however much we may regret it, must be allowed to die out.¹ Besides, there is one great evil connected with these shops, and that is, the facilities which they offer for running into debt, to the great injury of both buyer and seller. One of the Commissioners, Mr.

¹ But see Appendix VII., Village Life.

Fraser, has noticed this point, and one only ; but it is an evil which lies at the root of much domestic misery, even when it leads to nothing worse. The peasant's wife runs into debt without the knowledge of her husband, as if she was a fashionable lady : and the scenes which ensue upon discovery may easily be imagined. Now, by these co-operative stores, which, of course, are not peculiar to Assington, non-members are not trusted at all, and members are only trusted to the value of their shares ; so that it is placed beyond their power to mortgage their weekly wages. On the other hand, as the village shopkeeper is exactly in the same position as the West End tradesman—obliged to make his good debts pay for his bad ones—the prices which he is obliged to charge are exorbitant, and the consequence is, that the poor man's wages do not go half so far as they might easily be made to go under a better system. Besides the actual profit on the business, the money dividend is no inconsiderable addition to the poor man's income. On the whole, therefore, we believe that the extension of co-operative stores throughout the rural districts cannot be too highly recommended.

Mr. Stanhope alone mentions the occurrence of "strikes" among the agricultural labourers. One that he heard of was in Lincolnshire, for the purpose of obtaining a reduction in the hours of labour on account of the long distance which men had to walk to and fro. This was a failure. The other was in Kent, which achieved a temporary success, and may be described in Mr. Stanhope's own words :

"In May, 1866, the Kent Agricultural Labourers' Protection Association was formed in order 'to

organise the agricultural labourers with the view to the amelioration of their social condition and moral elevation, and to endeavour to mitigate the evils of their serfdom.' At that time labour was scarce, and the first effort of the association was directed to obtaining an increase of wages; and, in fact, it was mainly by means of this organisation that a general rise was shortly afterwards affected. As labour again became more abundant, the employers obtained more control over their men, and the result has been that the association has ceased to have any influence whatever. It is difficult to ascertain what were regarded by it as the principal steps in the amelioration of their condition. But curiously enough, the one thing especially desired for them by everyone who takes an interest in them—that is, the improvement of their cottages—was not an object of this association, because they all felt that improved cottages enabled the employer to obtain more control over his men."

To these instances may be added one that took place in Leicestershire some five or six years ago, when the men on strike got 7s. a week from their club for a considerable time, and used to be seen hanging about the fields with their hands in their pockets, or sitting upon gates smoking, in the enjoyment of a delicious idleness. How it ended I have forgotten, but the materials for such combinations do not as yet exist in the rural districts, where labour by itself cannot cope successfully with capital. [Eight years afterwards the attempt was made—with what success has been already stated.]

CHAPTER IX

VILLAGE LIFE—THE FEAST—THE HARVEST-HOME— THE CLUB

WHEN Lord Salisbury said that what was wanted to bring the labourer back to the land was not so much small holdings, or better cottages, or higher wages, but the "circus," he uttered in rather cynical tones, perhaps, a real truth. What has led the labourer away from his native village is the thirst for excitement, which he has been taught through a thousand channels that he will find in the town. Of course, a great variety of causes have contributed to this result. The labourer sees in the town opportunities of rising in life which do not exist in the village. They do not exist for the farmer nor yet for the squire, any more than they do for the labourer. Their place in society is fixed. But the peasant sees that artisans become shopkeepers, that shopkeepers become merchants, and that merchants become millionaires. If such thoughts ever entered into his head in old days, they remained thoughts only. He did not know how to go to work to begin a new career. But schools and railways have taught him. The town offers him both the excitement which the village no longer affords, and the chance of growing rich, such as agriculture can never hold out.

When the labourer calls his village life, as he often does, "a poor thing," it really is so, compared with

what it used to be within living memory.¹ But the labourer has changed too, and if the rural life of sixty years ago could be restored to-morrow, it would not be to him all that it was to his grandfather. Down to the middle of the nineteenth century, at all events, the villages kept up old festivals and traditional rejoicings with a heartiness which has now died out. I cannot remember the maypole, and have only seen a limited number of village greens of the old-fashioned cut; but the "feast," or "wake," which is still not entirely extinct, was in many English counties at the time spoken of a kind of village carnival, to which the whole population looked forward with intense delight. Most of the cottagers had then their friends and relatives to stay with them, and the poorest had a large piece of beef, a plum-pudding, and a bottle of home-made wine. The children who were out at service usually came home for the feast, or fee-ast, as it was pronounced in the midland counties; and by some of the more privileged among the matrons the parson's children would be asked to tea. The village street in the evening, if the feast came in the summer, was a regular promenade. Booths and caravans, with all kinds of shows, toys, and sweets, stood on all sides; and, as I need not say, the public-houses drove a roaring trade. The principal farmers did not in those days think it *infra dig.* to follow the example of the labourers, and they, too, used generally to have their houses full at the feast. It was a great time, too, for weddings; and also for fights. The champions of two neighbouring villages would often make a match to come off at the feast, besides the numerous scratch encounters got up over the pipes and ale. The feast

¹ Appendix VII., Village Life.

began on the saint's day to whom the church was dedicated, or the Sunday nearest to it, and usually lasted a week. It afforded matter to talk of for three months before it began and for three months after it was over.

I have known villages elsewhere where the great festival was on Trinity Sunday, and on the Monday evening the whole village danced upon the parson's lawn, the parson himself being one of the performers. Then there were Christmas Day and Plough Monday and Whitsuntide, and other time-honoured occasions which brought their appropriate diversions ; but which now, from all I can ascertain, if still observed, have lost much of their former light-hearted joviality. Above all, there was the harvest-home, for which the modern harvest festival is no exact equivalent, though it may be, and no doubt is, in some respects, a great improvement on it. But there is not the freedom, the licence, and the old joviality of the farm-house kitchen in these modern entertainments. They are not "cakes and ale," and can never be equally attractive to the younger generation, who will have their fling in one way or another, let the moralists say what they please.

In the days of old, then, the village was a little self-contained community, with its own simple round of amusements and interests, providing sufficient excitement for a population which knew no others, and rearing generation after generation of sturdy agricultural labourers, who accepted their vocation as a law of Nature, and never looked beyond it. Village life was not dull to *them*, partly because it really was more cheerful and diversified in itself than it is at present,

partly because the labourer had not learned to look abroad and compare "Mantua with Rome."

It was thought once that the institution of Parish Councils would give the labourer a new interest in village life ; and that by taking part in parish affairs, and being conscious of "the dignity of self-government," the labourer's character would be elevated, and his political sense sharpened. But from all I can hear the labourer cares not a straw about the Parish Council, nor has the Parish Council done anything for the labourer.¹ From all quarters, with very few exceptions, comes the same story. From Westmoreland, Yorkshire, Cheshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Surrey, Dorsetshire, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, the same report comes up. The labourer takes no interest whatever in the Parish Council, and never goes near it. He did at first believe—was perhaps encouraged to believe—that Parish Councils would cut up the large estates for his benefit ; but finding himself deceived in this very laudable expectation, he has shaken the dust off his feet against them and all that belongs to them.² I cannot ascertain from all the letters I have received that Parish Councils have done anything at all for the labourer, or indeed for anybody else. They have hardly touched the matter of allotments or small holdings. But, in fact, it is hardly their fault that they have done so little. In an ordinary English village of three or four hundred people there are not the materials for a representative institution fit to be entrusted with such duties as the Parish Councils were meant to undertake. In those villages where reading-rooms have been established

¹ See Appendix VI., Parish Councils. ² *Ibid.*

the labourers are glad to come to read the newspapers, or even to play whist, which some of them play very well. But these reading-rooms are not, as a rule, the work of the Parish Councils. A Lincolnshire correspondent tells me that in his district reading-rooms are not general, but that Debating Clubs are very popular!

“De conducendo loquitur Jam rhetore Thule.”

Certainly the intellectual standard of the English peasantry would appear to have been raised. But it has been by other hands than those of the “municipal” authorities—Heaven save the mark!

I have mentioned some exceptions¹ to that general estimate of Parish Councils in which so many English counties are agreed. One is from a landowner in Hampshire who differs in this respect from another Hampshire authority. He says that “though the labourers do not attend Parish Councils, Parish Councils do improve village life.” From an Essex village² I hear that “the Parish Council has hitherto worked most smoothly and comfortably,” and carries out necessary improvements in a friendly spirit, with the squire for Chairman. But even this informant does not say that the labourer takes part in it. Still less does he take part in the District Council, which really, I believe, does get through a certain amount of useful, practical work on a small scale.

¹ Appendix VI.

² Appendix VII.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY

1906

It seemed to me unnecessary to re-write the above chapter, though in some respects it has ceased to be applicable to the present condition of the labourer. His fortunes have improved so greatly within the last few years, that much as he may deserve our sympathy and assistance, he no longer stands in need of our compassion. But many of his habits and customs, his temptations and his difficulties, still remain the same ; nor does the public know more of them now, if I can trust my own observation, than it knew when the book was first written. I am in hopes, therefore, that even those parts of it which, to such as have studied the question, shall seem out of date, may still be useful to others who are comparatively unacquainted with it, and help them to judge for themselves during the important agrarian discussions which have yet to come.

1870

On a general retrospect of the ground we have now travelled over, the conclusion seems to be that the condition of the agricultural labourer is slowly but

surely on the rise.¹ If we look first to the conditions under which his labour is performed, we see that during the last few years the public gang system has received its death-blow, and that women have been gradually emancipating themselves from the more injurious and debasing kinds of work, while an Act of Parliament has been passed which will have the effect, in the long run, of restoring the homes of the peasantry to the villages in which they are employed. We see, too, that the nation has been awakened to a sense of its duties towards the children of the country as well as towards the children of the town, and that protective legislation will not long be wanted where the necessity for it can be shown to exist, though it is gratifying to learn that the children stand in much less need of it than it has recently been the fashion to suppose. The greatest limitations upon juvenile labour which any of the Commissioners recommend are comparatively slight; one of the ablest of them recommends the least of all; and the general impression seems to be, that were it not for the sake of education, the labour of young boys might safely be left to itself. The labour of girls is different. On this subject the preponderance of opinion seems to be, that they should be kept from work till sixteen years of age. For reasons already given I consider this age a mistake. On the score of morality it is too young. On the score of health and education it is unnecessarily old.

Wages.—On the subject of wages, it is more difficult to ascertain the exact truth than in any other branch of the inquiry. The practice of payment in kind, with all

¹This prophecy, it is needless to say, has been abundantly confirmed.—T. E. K., 1887.

its perplexing ramifications, opposes an obstacle to the inquirer which it is impossible to overcome without a patient and minute investigation of the system in all its phases—a task, it is needless to add, which the constant work of several years would be no more than sufficient to execute. But one or two facts which it seems impossible to dispute evolve themselves out of all this entanglement. There is a large class of labourers who, including the earnings of their families, are receiving, in cash and kind, upwards of £100 a year.¹ There is a very large class who are receiving from £70 to £80. Secondly, in all parts of England the peasantry have money in the Savings Banks. Thirdly, their personal appearance is not that of half-starved, down-trodden men. One is told this is all on the surface, and that though a life in the open air gives them a healthy look, they succumb to the first serious illness. But is this so? I greatly doubt it. I have seen numerous cases of ordinary day labourers recovering from very serious illness. Fourthly, there is a better test than all—their longevity. But if we have some reason for suspecting that the present remuneration of the agricultural labourer has been underrated, we have likewise ground to hope that his future remuneration is likely to be much higher. The large majority of competent witnesses appear to be of opinion that as the extension of scientific agriculture, combined with the use of machinery, extorts a larger produce from the soil, the labourer will, by a natural law, get his share of it in the form of increased wages. I would here call particular attention to the evidence given by Mr. Tremenhoe before the Enclosure Committee last year, and to Mr. Denton's "Letters

¹ Cf. cap. i.

on Agricultural Labour," which appeared originally in the *Daily News*. The first thinks that under a higher state of cultivation the land will support many more labourers.¹ The second contends that nothing is required to insure them higher wages but to make them better workmen;² and to this end he recommends that after a course of that more practical instruction in the schoolroom which has been already referred to (p. 82), each boy, on going to farm work, should be placed under some special instructor, such as the shepherd, the carter, or the thatcher, and serve a term of apprenticeship to some particular department of labour. A system of examination and prizes might be instituted, he thinks, to stimulate both master and pupil; and he makes no doubt that the result of it would soon be seen in the higher wages which farmers would gladly pay in return for the savings they would effect by the employment of skilled labour.³

Cottages.—On the subject of cottages, it seems only necessary to add that the Union Chargeability Bill has destroyed the principal motive which prompted the village ratepayer to destroy them; and that it seems to be admitted that the cottage accommodation of the poor—partly, perhaps, owing to this cause, partly to the Report of Dr. Hunter—has greatly improved throughout the country during the last few years. (*Vide* evidence before the Enclosure Committee, 1025—1027.) Allotments and cottage gardens, though not yet everywhere provided, are almost everywhere acknowledged to be necessary;

¹ Cf. p. 146.

² They have got worse and worse. See chap. iii.

³ Cf. pp. 73-76.

while the legislation promised to us on the subject of future "Enclosures," which, with proper reservations, will be highly beneficial in itself, is pretty sure, at the same time, to encourage the extension of the system by private individuals. [All these expectations have now been more than realised.—1887.]

Education.—The education of the agricultural labourer is a question which has not yet run itself entirely clear of all perplexities, as it still seems a moot point among persons interested in the subject, whether we are to look to higher wages as a condition of better education, or to better education as a condition of higher wages. According to the one view, we have no right to expect the agricultural labourer to be an exception to general rules. Our physical necessities have a primary claim upon us, and it is not until these are satisfied that higher wants begin even to be felt. The next stage is the desire of decency and comfort; and after this comes the craving for mental cultivation. According to others, it is only education which can produce the desire for education, and it must be forced upon the agricultural labourer, whether he wishes it or not. The common-sense view of the question lies, probably, between the two. The peasant appreciates education for his children as a means of bettering their condition even now. And if it can be brought home to him, as it might be by Mr. Denton's plan, that a different education would better their condition still more, he would not shrink from the cost of it. By taking advantage of this feeling, the next generation might be brought to value it for its own sake. But there is little necessity to dwell upon this branch of the subject in the present chapter; for whatever else

may be said of the condition of the English labourer, it cannot at all events be denied that his educational prospects are brightening, and that, if he has anything to fear on this head, it is rather from excess of zeal than from defect. [This expectation also has been completely realised.—1887.] The preponderating opinion at present is, that his children should be sent to school regularly up to ten years of age, and intermittently up to twelve or thirteen.

Hiring.—The existing systems of hiring seem productive of great dissatisfaction, but hitherto all attempts at substitutes have been failures. The statute fair seems to be on the decline. But there is no reason to suppose that as yet it is moribund; and it is worth consideration whether it is not susceptible of being brought under humanising influences, and converted into a harmless festival, seeing that the labouring classes do not certainly have too many holidays in their lives. The Register Office¹ for agricultural labourers has not been found to answer; and though in some parts of England servants are hired through the medium of newspaper advertisements, the system does not seem likely to become general. Yearly hiring can, of course, be managed without the statute fair. But the objection to it is that it encourages constant change, and creates a vagrant population. A man hired by the week cannot change every week, and so very often does not change at all. But the man hired for a year feels himself bound, somehow or other, to change at the end of it. The disadvantages of the weekly system are that the labourers are less certain of employment,

¹ “The schoolmaster” system (*vide* p. 184) might perhaps be worth a further trial.

and always liable to be thrown out of their incomes by sickness. This last objection must always, to some extent, remain in force. But the former need not, for the best workman will always be secure against the caprice or stinginess of the farmer; and if a classification could be organised, by which inferior ones got less wages, they might feel almost equally safe.

The Public-House.—Of all the evils with which the agricultural labourer is called on to contend, the public-house is not only the worst, but infinitely the most difficult to deal with; a powerful trading interest is enlisted in support of it; a powerful political party is jealous of the local influences by which alone it can be moderated; while a third would be sure to use all its influence against that substitute, without which reforms would be impossible. The country brewers, in the first place; the enemies of local self-government, and especially of aristocratic or clerical self-government, in the second; and those who wage a general war against all alcoholic drink, in the third place, would probably join together against the only feasible plan for the removal of this nuisance. Free beer-sellers, to be licensed by the local magistrates, and effectually prevented from allowing it to be drunk on the premises, would interpose between the cottager and the temptations of the public-house; while unrestricted competition would relieve from the necessity of dozing himself with poisoned beer. But they would be doing for one indulgence very much what the Contagious Diseases Act has done for another. They would, in the next place, be undermining a lucrative monopoly. And they would bring additional influence into the hands

of a class whose power it is thought desirable in some quarters rather to curtail than to augment.

It is, however, to be remembered at the same time, that the vice of drinking, which we are apt to flatter ourselves survives only among the poorer classes of society, is not yet extinct among the upper. Among many of the outward conformers to a better creed the pagan worship still lingers. The rites are different, but the idol is the same. And here we would quote a curious testimony to the truth of this opinion from the pen of a great novelist, whose acquaintance with English society will not be disputed, which I met with after writing the above :

“And then there are the shades of black which come from conviviality—which we may call table blackness—as to which there is an opinion constantly disseminated by the moral newspapers of the day, that there has come to be altogether an end of any such blackness among sheep who are gentlemen. To make up for this, indeed, there has been expressed by the piquant newspapers of the day an opinion that ladies are taking up the game which gentlemen no longer care to play. It may be doubted whether either expression has in it much of truth. We do not see ladies drunk, certainly, and we do not see gentlemen tumbling about as they used to do, because their fashion of drinking is not that of their grandfathers. But the love of wine has not gone out from among men ; and men now are as prone as ever to indulge their loves.”

There is no doubt that, although habitual intemperance is now a vice rather for derision than imitation, and that to get drunk before women

would be visited with social ostracism, yet that among men an occasional transgression is still regarded as a joke, and that as we descend in the scale of society we shall find it less occasional. The influence of this fact upon the working class is seen far and wide ; and the example in a country neighbourhood of a single farmer or gentleman who is occasionally seen in what Baron Bradwardine calls the "predicament of intoxication," to say nothing of the many others who show, by their jests upon the failing, that they regard it with a lenient eye, will neutralise all the efforts of those who exert themselves to reclaim the labourer to sobriety. In fact, the whole tone of society at large must change on this subject before any great improvement can be looked for. At present there is a sort of tacit understanding, an ingenious hypocrisy, as it were, among men of the world in relation to this particular infirmity which permeates the whole community, opposing that kind of yielding resistance to the rebukes of the moralist which is the most difficult of all to be overcome.

Game.—Among the peculiar sources of demoralisation to which the English peasant is exposed, the preservation of game is often cited as the worst. This is a very great mistake. Nobody knows better than the poacher the real character of game. If his apologists like to shelter him behind a wholly mistaken conception of it, of course he will avail himself of their kindness. But as for supposing that the poacher himself is led away by the delusion that pheasants are wild animals in which nobody has any right of property, it is one of those fond inventions which only personal acquaintance with a single

member of the profession is required to dispel. Game is no more a temptation to dishonesty than other luxuries; and whatever is to be said against the Game Laws is to be said against them rather as a farmer's grievance than a labourer's.

Benefit Societies.—The chief evils¹ which vitiate a certain class of Benefit Societies are, first, the unrestricted power which they enjoy of squandering the club funds at public-houses; secondly, the facilities which the younger members possess for repudiating their obligations to the elder; and thirdly, the absence of any machinery by which the benefit of a man's savings may be secured to his widow and children, should he die without having had any occasion to draw upon the club funds. We are told, however, that the class of societies which are chiefly affected by these evils are gradually on the wane; that the peasantry themselves are fully alive to the disadvantages of them; and that leading men in various counties are exerting themselves either to extend or to introduce a better system. In regard to this subject, we are sometimes encountered by the assertion that the agricultural labourer will never derive all the advantages which he might derive from such institutions as long as he has the parish to fall back upon. That this prospect may weaken his motive for self-denial is not to be disputed; but it seems impossible to banish it. The receipt even of outdoor relief is not, upon the whole, a boon to which the poor look forward with complacency. Seclusion in the "Bastile" itself they contemplate with horror. In the next generation these feelings, we may hope, will be still stronger

¹ Written 1870.

than they are now ; and to these we must trust for counteracting the bad effects of a system which, wholly to dispense with, would be almost to abolish the Poor Law.

Co-operative Farming.—A novelty which some people recommend with great confidence as a mode of mending the condition of the labourer is the plan which has been described in operation on Mr. Gardon's estate in Suffolk—the plan of co-operative farming. The system has much to recommend it. It betters the condition of the labourer, and gives him an interest in the land. And as it is capable of being conducted on a large scale, it is free from some of the objections which attach to small farms. But though it gives the peasantry an interest in the soil, it does not give them that *kind* of interest which it is most desirable to encourage—the interest inspired by the allotment or the garden which they cultivate with their own hands. And secondly, one of the main points on which its prosperity is represented as depending, avoidance, namely, of all the expenses which are incidental to the position of an ordinary tenant-farmer, by the employment of a paid manager at 12s. a week, means, of course, the supersession of a very valuable element in our rural system by one which, for every other purpose than that, is confessedly inferior. No such objections, however, attach to the establishment of co-operative stores, which seem an unmitigated benefit to country villages, and cannot, in our opinion, be too widely spread throughout the kingdom.¹

Allotments.—The three points of controversy in

¹ This is put too broadly. See Appendix VII., Village Life.

connection with allotments are: whether the letting of them should be entrusted by statute to parish authorities; whether these should be empowered to seize land for the purpose when the owners are not willing to let it; and whether the occupiers should be placed under the conditions of the Agricultural Holdings Act. My own inclination was, and still is, to answer all three questions in the negative (1906).

Small Farms.—The question of small farms *versus* large seems to turn on three considerations, namely, which is the better for the labourer, which is the better for the land, and which is the better for the interests of the nation at large. And these three questions do not necessarily run into each other, as it is conceivable that some sacrifice of material produce might be worth making for the sake of ulterior advantages.¹ As regards the individual, it is clear that what he cannot do as a small proprietor he will not be able to do as a small farmer. Now, as to the prosperity of even small proprietors, the evidence collected by the Commission of 1867 is very unsatisfactory,² and we might, therefore, be justified in reasoning *à fortiori* against that of small tenants. But, independently of this argument, there is abundance of evidence to show that the advantages of small farming and large are at least evenly balanced; that much depends upon the character of the population, the construction of society, the existence of rival industries, and finally, on the nature of the soil, by which also must be determined their comparative effects upon the land. If, with

¹ *Cf.* cap. vii., 164, 5.

² The evidence in the Duke of Richmond's Reports, 1880, is all against it.

these conditions before us, we ask ourselves which of the two is, *on the whole*, the better suited to England, we shall find the balance incline perceptibly in favour of our present system. We say on the whole, because we readily admit that it is desirable to keep in hand a certain proportion of small farms to serve particular purposes. But all things considered — the future as well as the present of agricultural labour, the soil and climate¹ of England, the existence of our immense commercial industry—the conclusion seems to stand out quite clearly that a general exchange of large farms for small would not, in the long run, either improve the condition of the peasantry or increase the produce of our agriculture. Is there any other reason, then, which should weigh with us in favour of a general redistribution of farms and properties? On the contrary, the evidence on non-material grounds is all against it. We might sacrifice our rural system for the sake of small farming were this proved to be of paramount importance. But to introduce small farming for the sake of destroying our rural system would seem to be simple infatuation, except on political grounds. The conclusion is, then, that other considerations being assumed to be equal, social considerations turn the scale in favour of our own method as a general national principle.

Having thus briefly recapitulated the several topics on which I have tried to throw some light in the foregoing chapters, I have only to repeat that I lay no claim to any merit beyond that of bringing within a narrow compass the chief questions which arise out of the condition of the agricultural labourer, and of calling attention to the salient points in each. I have

¹ Medium character of the one, variable character of the other.

stated a certain number of conclusions to which a great mass of evidence appears to tend ; but I have always done my best to give their full weight to all modifying considerations. I know of no question, if we except religious ones, which requires to be approached with a mind so attuned to impartiality as this one of the agricultural labourer. On the one hand is his life of silent, secluded, uncomplaining toil, always suggestive of the *qui laborat orat* ; his undeniable privations, his honesty, his simplicity, his helplessness, so unlike the self-assertion and pugnacity of the city artisan ; all prepossessing us in his favour, all imbuing us with the idea that a system which does not do more for him must be radically indefensible.¹ On the other hand, we see in him but one link in a great social chain which has endured for centuries, the origin of which was noble and generous, and the continuation of which has been secured from age to age by the accumulative force of kindly traditions and immemorial sympathies. If we fail to give its full value to every reflection which is suggested by either side of the shield, we shall infallibly draw wrong conclusions ; and it is the certainty of this which should make us so cautious of dogmatising. But I am happy in believing that the more the question is studied, the more it will be seen that the highest interests of the landlord, the tenant, and the labourer harmonise with each other, and that in a logical development of, rather than a total departure from, the ancient social system of England lies our best hope for the future.

¹ Since this was written, much of his primitive simplicity has departed from him, and a great deal more has been done for him.—T. E. K., 1906.

APPENDIX I.—1906.

WAGES.

Page 5.—Wages in Westmoreland have risen considerably during the last twenty years.

Page 8.—In Hampshire there has been a substantial rise in wages. Shepherd gets 15s. a week and £6 at Michaelmas. Waggoner gets 13s. a week with £3 at Michaelmas, and 1s. a day extra during harvest. Day labourer 24s. a week for about eight weeks, and 12s. the rest of the year. His earnings seem to be about £36 per annum, as against £31 or £32 twenty years ago. I have received two separate accounts from Hampshire, differing in detail, but same in the end. The figures are quite independent of earnings of family.

Page 14.—In Gloucestershire wages have risen, but as in many other counties, not sufficiently so as to cause any material change in the labourer's condition. Shepherds and carters get 15s. a week instead of 14s. Day labourers get 12s. a week in winter and 15s. in summer. Women get at the rate of 7s. 6d. a week. This last account comes from the Tewkesbury district, where the men dislike piecework, and most of it is done by women who, together with their children, can earn from 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d. a day in the vegetable season. This growing dislike of piecework was noticed by Mr. Clare Sewell Read twenty years ago, as one of the worst signs of the times. All desired to be paid alike, the worst the same as the best. This is a doctrine which has crept into the country from the towns.

Page 26, Northamptonshire, 1906.

Employment.	By Week.	By Piece.	By Harvest.	By Perquisites.
Shepherd ...	16s and house and allotment 30 poles.	Shearing. 2s per score in addition to weekly wages.	£1	1d for each single lamb. 3d for each pair raised.
Carter ...	17s per week.	...	About £3	
Yardman ...	16s per week.	...	About £2 10s	
Day Labourer	14s per week.	Varying sums.	About £2 10s	
Women ...	Very few this neighbourhood when employed.	employed on land in neighbourhood.	1s 6d per	
Boys... ...	From 3s to 10s according to age.	...	Double wages for 4 weeks.	

In 1886 the sum total of the day labourer's earnings is given at about £39, and they have just fallen by about 1s a week. In 1906 it is about £40 12s.

Page 27, Central Oxfordshire. — A return from South Oxfordshire, on borders of Berkshire, for 1906 gives rather higher figures. Total, shepherd, £52; carter, £46 15s.; day labourer, £43 10s. Boys from thirteen years of age to twenty get from 3s. a week to 10s. In this country there is a good deal of piecework.

Employment.	By Week.	By Piece.	Harvest.	By Perquisites.	Total per Annum.
Shepherds	15s	Shearing, washing, and lamb allowance etc.	£3	Cottage rents paid by labourers, etc., from 1s to 1s 8d per week, with large gardens and potato ground given by farmer.	£ s. d. 52 0 0
Carters	15s	Drilling or sowing, 1s. Corn to market, 1s. Grass mowing, 1s. Corn binding, 2s.	£6		46 15 0
Day Labourers	13s	Hoeing, cutting grass and corn, manuring thrashing machine & grinding.	£4		43 10 0
Boys	13 to 20	3s to 10s	£1 10s to £2		

Page 28, Leicestershire.

From an experienced land agent, May, 1906.

A good shepherd will earn 19s. per week per annum, with cottage and garden free.

A good waggoner will earn 19s. per week per annum, with cottage and garden free.

A good day labourer will earn 18s. per week per annum.

Women do not work on land, but do stocking seaming at home. Girls go to factories. No domestic servants.

Boys are very scarce. Most go to factories, but could earn 6s. to 10s. per week on land.

Page 22, North Suffolk.—Here is a distinct, though slight, improvement.

Shepherd, 13s. per week. Each lamb, 6d., and for couples, 1s.

Carter, 14s., and for the harvest weeks, £8.

Labourer, 12s., and for harvest, £8.

Women for picking stones, 2d. per bushel. Boys cannot now be got.

Page 30, Lincolnshire.—The day labourer now gets 15s. a week, and boys 9s.

The following table was sent from Mid-Lincolnshire, Dec. 5, 1906 :—

Shepherd.—Year's wages, £36 15s. 4d., equivalent to 2s. 4d. per diem. Also receives 30 stones pork ; 40 pecks of potatoes ; and 2d on each lamb (about 500). Also a cottage worth 1s. 6d. weekly.

Yardman.—Year's wages, £33 12s. 2d., equivalent to 2s. 2d. per diem. Also receives 30 stones pork ; 30 pecks of potatoes ; 60 faggots (worth 10s.) ; and 15s. for harvest beer. Also a cottage worth 1s. 6d. weekly.

Day Labourers.—15s. per week ; but by means of piecework at different times of the year can often earn much more.

APPENDIX II.

LABOUR.

Page 48, Lincolnshire.—The following account of the Lincolnshire potato industry has been sent me by a resident agriculturist: "This is an industry which has largely developed of late, especially in this parish—Friskney. Its area is mainly along a low ridge of land called the 'Tofts,' originally the primeval sea bank, a light and fertile soil, specially suited to the potato and other garden produce. It extends from Wainfleet to Kirton

beyond Boston, about eighteen miles in length and from one to four in breadth. A very smart system of culture has been adopted. The tubers intended to secure the early market are forced in boxes kept under cover. After the first crop has been taken up, that is about the middle of April, the soil is immediately prepared for planting celery, yielding a fine crop in or by October, so a double return is obtained from the land. If an early yield of potatoes is obtained in the first ten days or so after the middle of June very high prices are earned, the maximum up to £13 a ton, the maximum yield being about 5 tons to an acre. The labourers have a full share in this movement, being very energetic in securing an early yield from their allotments. It is computed that about £5,000 comes into the parish annually from this industry." Thus it seems that a labourer with a one-acre allotment might more than double his wages by the sale of his potatoes.

From Dorsetshire I hear there is plenty of labour now—the exodus being chiefly among bricklayers, masons, carpenters, etc. In other counties it is among shoemakers, framework-knitters or stockings and lace-makers. Village mills, small breweries, and malt houses have all disappeared. But my informant does not think that education has had much to do with the exodus, herein differing very much from one of my Northamptonshire correspondents. He attributes it to the great demand for able-bodied men as policemen, railway porters, etc.

Page 42.—From Gloucestershire I hear there is a general desire on part of farmers and parents that boys should leave school at thirteen; boys like to get to work. The labourer does not understand much about educational systems, nor the religious difficulty. He wants his children taught religion, and generally would like them to be brought up in the same religious body as himself.

Page 46-49, Effect of Education on Labour.—The above correspondent notices what the farmers in general resent very warmly. The hard-and-fast rule that every boy should stay at school till he has passed a certain standard, whether he has brains or not, presses heavily on the parents of those destined for farm work, as well as on the farmer, especially on the small occupier, as the parents would be thankful for the earnings, and the farmer has now to put men to do boys' work.

It seems to me that by the time a boy is twelve years old his teachers ought to have found out his capabilities for learning, and if he is found to be a dull scholar he should be allowed to go to work on a farm. A boy so doing would make a much better labourer than the precocious and impudent youngster turned loose at, say, fourteen years old after perhaps passing the seventh standard, who, as a rule, has much too good an opinion of himself to do work of any kind well.

Page 50.—Another Dorsetshire correspondent agrees perfectly with my Leicestershire correspondent as to the present quality of agricultural labour. “The old skilled agricultural labourer is dying away, and we get in his place a number of men whose great aim is to work as short a time as they can, and to do as little as they can in the time.”

APPENDIX III.

COTTAGES.

Page 53.—In Leicestershire a land agent in the southern district writes of one estate with which he is connected, belonging, I believe, to Lord Cottesloe.

The cottages on this estate have been greatly improved during the last seven years, most of them having three private bedrooms with fireplaces in each, good living room and parlour, and each has a large garden of nearly a rood of land, and never let for more than 2s. per week.

In Gloucestershire three-roomed cottages are let for about 1s. 6d. a week, but the labourers prefer a large one with some garden for 2s. 6d. a week.

In Dorsetshire and Wiltshire cottages are said to have improved a good deal in the last twenty-five years, and on many estates is as good as can be desired. It is on the estate of the poor landlord who is dependent entirely on land for his income that the worst class of cottage is found, also amongst those belonging to small owners. It must be remembered that cottage building to let at the rent usually charged to farm labourers, viz., 1s. to 2s. per week, does not pay interest on outlay, repairs and rates.

APPENDIX IV.

SMALL HOLDINGS AND ALLOTMENTS.

Page 66.—There is still a great demand for small holdings, but people prefer to hire. The Act to facilitate the purchase of such land is not acceptable here, as there is difficulty in finding the required two-thirds. The small tradesman, publican, butcher or carrier, find it much to their benefit to work the land. As to the minimum holding on which a man can by agriculture alone make a living in this district (Marsh and Toft), where the land is adapted for potatoes, celery, and vegetables, a man who works and is thrifty will get a good living off six acres. On the heavy land where two horses are required to plough, there should not be less than twenty acres. On the wolds where sheep and barley are the principal things, not less than sixty acres are required.

There is a large proportion of small free-holders here and an ample supply of one acre allotments, which are eagerly taken by the labourers. There are also about fifty acres of land which are let by the Parish Charity Trustees in acre lots, some with a cottage on the holding. Mid-Lincolnshire, 1906.

Lord Onslow says, "I am holding an enquiry into the question of small holdings, and I think it is quite clear that where land is suitable there are plenty of people willing to take it up if they can be shown how to work it, and where small holdings have recently come into existence, the usual tale of rural depopulation is greatly less than elsewhere."—May 15, 1906.

My Lincolnshire correspondent says the same thing. The granting of allotments and the building of new cottages have done much towards keeping the young and able men in the parish.

A Surrey correspondent, writing from near Godalming, says that in his parish and in the neighbourhood, farmers able to work a sixty acre farm with the help of a son and one labourer seem to do fairly well.

Pages 61-2.—The most important testimony to the truth of what I have written, both about allotments and small holdings,

come from a gentleman in Lincolnshire, who describes himself as an earnest advocate for the extension of them, and even recommends for England "the adoption of some such remedial measure as the Land Act recently granted to Ireland." But what does he add: "But in my advocacy I have never lost sight of the fact that such a measure would require much safeguarding. I have ever said that it would be unwise to offer wholesale facilities in the first instance, unless to men who have already had some experience either by the successfully managing an allotment or small holding, or had been brought up in a district where such are prevalent. Summed up in a sentence, I think in most districts object lessons would have to be provided by the transference of men from such districts as this."

The reader must remember, however, that this is only one side of the picture. From other parts of England the reports down to present date are as unfavourable to small holdings as ever. From Wiltshire, Dorsetshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire, I have letters which still describe peasant farming, pure and simple, as a failure.

By a leading agriculturist in Northamptonshire, I am told that the cry of "back to the land is a mischievous one. We don't want the surplus. They will do better away."

For Dorsetshire and Wiltshire.—My correspondent, who speaks for both of these counties, says that most of the cottages have large gardens, and that most of the men will not trouble themselves with anything more unless they have very large families who can help. "I know," he adds, "many instances where allotments have been given up and returned to the towns." Twenty years ago, when Lord Onslow's book was published, the same thing was going on in several other counties. But in the adjoining county of Hampshire, a small farmer tells me that the system is very successful, and that even "very small corn farms" answer. I confess this is a solitary witness.

My Lincolnshire correspondent is against the ownership of small holdings because of the danger of sub-division—of which he gives some ludicrous instances—"nothing more fatal than premature ownership."

APPENDIX V.

PUBLICAN AND POACHER.

Page 105, Adulteration of Beer.—If the Temperance party would only address themselves to this question, they would do more towards the extinction of intemperance among the working classes than by any such Bills as have recently been brought into Parliament. But to require a publican to declare whether his liquor is pure malt and hops or not, is thought, forsooth, to savour of "protection." And to this wretched bugbear the health and morals of the poor are freely sacrificed by the fanatical pedantry which seems at present, at all events, to have got the ear of the public.

APPENDIX VI.

PARISH COUNCILS.

Page 135.—From Northamptonshire I hear from two most competent witnesses that Parish Councils have done the labourer no service, "except to make him conceited and socialistic." From the same county a largely employed land agent writes that "labourers take no interest whatever in Parish Council matters."

From Lincolnshire I have an interesting account of one Parish Council which is a type of most in that neighbourhood. "The Parish Council in this, as in most of the adjoining parishes, is run by the political dissenters who have the labour vote in their hands. Under the lead of a very able Radical small farmer, they secure nine members, labourers, small holders, a postman, and a carpenter, against three Conservatives, the principal farmers in the parish. There is no interest in their proceedings or respect for them as a body. The labourers expected great things from them, in the one main object of their desires. They thought that the Parish Council would have power to force landlords to sell their best pieces of land to make allotments, and finding that this could not be done, regard the Parish Council as useless."

From one district of Surrey I am told the difficulty is to find anyone to sit in the Parish Council.

From Gloucestershire, my informant says Parish Councils in villages have done very little. District Councils do most of the work.

From Leicestershire, my correspondent says very little interest in these parts is taken either in the Parish or the District Council. The labourers who began to attend them at first don't come near them now.

Page 136.—On the other side of the question, I have letters from Hampshire and Essex which give a more favourable account of the Parish Council. A landowner not many miles from Newbury says that though labourers do not attend the Parish Council, these institutions “do improve village life, and as a rule do not make men discontented or disaffected.”

From Essex I have received a very pleasing picture. “In our parish,” says an Essex vicar, “the Parish Council has hitherto worked most smoothly and comfortably. It depends chiefly on local individualities. I have heard of a parish where an ‘aggressive grunter’ has made every meeting more or less Bedlam. But here they levy only a tiny rate, and work up little measures of improvement in a very pleasant and cheery way. The old Squire was chairman until quite lately, when he gave way to a young man of character and means, who takes the same sort of kindly interest in furthering the good of the parish as his predecessor in office.”

APPENDIX VII.

VILLAGE LIFE.

Page 129, Co-operative Stores.—Many of my correspondents regret the extinction of the small village industries, among which the village shop is of course included, as a distinct loss to the life of the little communities. They created a variety of interests and occupations, and kept up village life, I think, to a higher social level. Here is another instance in which moral considerations seem in conflict with commercial—raising a

problem which may possibly become more and more pressing as the century advances, and Socialism throws down the gauntlet of political economy, with which it is clearly irreconcilable.

Page 133.—My Essex friend also sends me an account of village life in his own parish which shows that it need not be dull even under modern conditions. The rising generation have created new interests for themselves which supply the place of the old one, and keep the young labourers at home. "Wages are about the same as they were thirteen years ago. But the man and the youth have changed: more sober, thoughtful, and cultivated in some respects. Many of the young labourers have bicycles, and study some trade or hobby as a recreation. Lads attend continuation classes. Some of our young fellows draw pictures, pencil or brushwork, and frame them afterwards. Lads at school and a little older design patterns in form and colour exceedingly well. I have sixteen young fellows now associated in a Voluntary Gardens Association. We meet once a month to talk gardens, flowers, fruit, and vegetables. Nearly all have some particular plant, or class of plants, flowers and vegetables, that they make a special study of, observe its peculiarities of growth and structure. I have a great opinion of the better class of the village young men, decent, honest, wholesome fellows, trying to improve themselves and others."

There do not seem to be the same number of large families in the neighbourhood; but what children there are are better cared for.

Other correspondents regret, as I do myself, the disappearance of all the small village industries, which, apart from their material results, kept the place alive, and created a variety of interests.

APPENDIX VIII.

At the risk of being charged with vain repetitions, I have decided on republishing the three following articles which appeared in the edition of 1887. Although the exact situation which suggested them has passed away, the question of allotments and small holdings is still before the public, and the facts and arguments set out in the "St. James' Gazette," though twenty-three years old, may still possess some interest for the public whenever the controversy is renewed.

ALLOTMENTS AND SMALL HOLDINGS.

I HERE reprint, in their chronological order, some articles on these subjects, written since 1883, in the *St. James' Gazette*:—

LABOURERS' ALLOTMENTS AND THE TENANTS' COMPENSATION BILL.

August 17, 1883.

The English Tenants' Compensation Bill has been read a third time in the House of Lords after having been largely modified in committee by a series of amendments, most of which it will be time enough to consider when they come under the notice of the House of Commons. There is one, however, on which we should like to say a few words before that time arrives; and that is the amendment to the 53rd Clause, moved by Lord Camperdown, and only feebly resisted by the Government; who, indeed, cannot have much to say against it as it was originally their own proposal. In the Bill as sent up to the House of Lords the Clause ran as follows:—"Nothing in the Act shall apply to a holding that is not either wholly agricultural or wholly pastoral, or in part agricultural and as to the residue pastoral, or in whole or in part cultivated as a market-garden." But in the Bill introduced into the House of Commons nothing was said about market-gardens; and after the words

"as to the residue pastoral" came the words "or to any holding that is of less extent than two acres." This was the first idea of the Government; but they abandoned it at the instance of Mr. Jesse Collings, who succeeded in obtaining for market-gardeners an equal claim to compensation with regular farmers. The honourable member for Ipswich, indeed, wished to go still further, and to make the Bill applicable to all tenancies, whether weekly or yearly, including, of course, cottage gardens. Mr. Dodson declined to accede to this proposal, and consented to do away with the limit of extent only on condition that the limit of time should be retained. In this form the clause went up to the other House, when Lord Camperdown carried the amendment we have mentioned restoring the limit of two acres, but saving the rights of the market-gardeners which the House of Commons had recognised. Lord Kimberley suggested that the limit of one acre would meet the requirements of the case; and it is quite possible that this may be the ultimate arrangement.

Some limit of this kind appears to us absolutely necessary if the Bill is not to exercise a very injurious effect upon the allotment system. There may be holders of allotments who are tenants at will, and others who are weekly tenants; but many, if not the great majority, are yearly tenants, and would come under the operation of the Act unless expressly exempted from it. It is possible that some confusion may have arisen from the fact that in those parts of England where cottage gardens are uncommon the allotments are often called gardens: a name which may also be derived from the purpose for which they were originally intended – the growth of fruit and vegetables, and not of corn. Be this as it may, however, many agricultural labourers are yearly tenants of their rood or two roods of ground; and to place them in the position which the present Bill contemplates for the regular tenant-farmer would defeat one of the principal objects for the sake of which the allotment system deserves to be encouraged. That object is the promotion of orderly and thrifty habits among the agricultural poor. An allotment is not let to an agricultural labourer as a farm is let to a farmer, that he may live by it and make the cultivation of it his business. His business remains what it was: he is a carter, or ploughman, or shepherd, or hedger and ditcher, or general labourer, as the case may be; and by the wages so earned he supports himself and his family. The allotment is a *πάρεργον*, something at which

he can labour when his proper day's work is over, and which adds a few pounds, perhaps as much as four or five, to his yearly income ; but it is not what he mainly depends upon, the loss of which would be the loss of his livelihood. Here is a wide difference between a farmer and a holder of an allotment which the House of Commons should bear in mind. To deprive a man of his allotment is not the serious thing which it is to deprive him of his farm, be it small or large—three acres, thirty acres, or three hundred acres. The allotment is mainly useful as a constant incentive to and guarantee for good conduct. It is a small benefit over and above the returns of the “regular branch of industry” pursued by the agricultural labourer, and may most legitimately be made use of for the promotion of sobriety and morality. As it is, the system is found to be a most efficient instrument for good in the hands of those who now administer it. But change the nature of an allotment—make the holder of it as independent of his landlord as the tenant of an ordinary farm is meant to be by this Bill—and this salutary influence of the system is destroyed.

So much the better, we think we hear our Radical philanthropists exclaim. Virtuous habits, if men are indebted for them to the parson and the squire, are as degrading as vicious ones. They are poisoned at the source. Neat cottages, well-clad children, empty public-houses, full churches may be good things in their way, perhaps ; but they are purchased at an awful price if they come of feudal and ecclesiastical influence. Better far the scowling brow, the slovenly dress, the drink, the blasphemy, and the brutality, if they denote independence of mind and a contempt for the patronage of gentle-folk. With this argument against the moral benefits of the allotment system we confess ourselves incapable of coping. But, if the enthusiasts who rely on it can condescend to mere ordinary common sense they will see that it is only a system of promotion by merit which ought not surely to be condemned by them. The allotment system works on that principle ; and to revolutionise it as it will be revolutionised, unless Lord Camperdown's amendment or Lord Kimberley's compromise be adopted, will be to make it at once so vexatious and so useless that we are persuaded it would soon be abandoned.

PEASANT FARMING.

September 2, 1885.

The value of peasant farming, like so many other important questions which occupy the attention of reformers, depends on both moral and material considerations. If the results of the system are shown to be unfavourable to agriculture, we cannot dismiss the subject till we have considered its influence on character; nor can we rest satisfied with this till we have ascertained exactly at what price it is purchased in the shape of diminished production. Now, there can be no doubt, we think, that there is an overwhelming preponderance of evidence against the purely material advantages of peasant farming. It is not as if it were an experiment about to be tried in England for the first time. It has already existed in this country on a large scale, and died away, no doubt, before the progress of social conditions unfavourable to its continuance. What is more, survivals of it are still to be met with in sufficient numbers to enable us to form some opinion of what the state of English agriculture would be, should it ever again become the rule, as it was formerly, instead of the exception. In the north of England, and in the eastern counties (districts certainly not peopled by an inferior race of peasantry), in the dales of Cumberland and the Fen districts of Lincolnshire, peasant proprietors are to be found in considerable numbers: with one uniform result, if we may judge from evidence which there is no ground for suspecting of partiality. Bad farming, slovenly habits, ignorance, poverty, and debt are their prevailing characteristics. In the Isle of Axholme, with an exceptionally fertile soil exactly suitable for spade husbandry, the proprietors are all in debt, at the mercy of the nearest lawyer who holds mortgages on their land, and are obliged to do *his* bidding at all events, whatever they may say to the country gentlemen. "They appear to be prosperous," says Mr. Stanhope, one of the Commissioners for inquiring into the employment of women and children on agriculture; "but they are more hardly worked and less well-fed and housed than the hired labourer." To whatever quarter of England the inquirer may turn, he will receive nearly the same answer from every competent witness whose opinion he may ask.

The statements which have recently appeared in a series of

letters in the *Times* show that the conditions of the question are the same now as they were when this evidence was given. Nothing has occurred in the meantime to improve the prospects of peasant farming, and a good deal, we should say, to make them worse. Nor does it strengthen the argument on their behalf to appeal to the example of other countries. But what says a correspondent of the *Times*, M. Antoine Salmond, of the Swiss system? He says that the cultivators of very small farms in Switzerland "are as a rule prosperous and well-to-do people." What he means is the converse—namely, that prosperous and well-to-do people are the cultivators of small farms. For what does he add? "But"—and there is a world in this *but*—"such small proprietors have usually some extra occupation." Of course they have, or they would not be prosperous and well-to-do. Go into any ordinary country village in England, and you will always find that the man who is doing well with a few acres of ground is the publican, the butcher, or the shop-keeper—the man who in a bad year has other resources to fall back upon. Further letters in the *Times* tell us the same thing of the peasantry of the Auvergne and the Tyrol; and the solitary witness in favour of the French peasantry does not say what part of France he refers to, and whether to corn-farming or market-gardening. There are exceptional circumstances and conditions under which little farms may be cultivated to considerable advantage. That is not denied for one moment. The question is, What is the general rule with regard to this system of agriculture?

Such being its material aspects, what have its advocates to say for it, from a moral point of view, to counteract the heavy drawbacks which the political economist detects in it? They will tell us that it fosters independence. This is Mr. Hall's assertion in a recent letter to the *Times*. He contrasts the erect and independent bearing of the French peasant with "the slouching gait" of the English agricultural labourer. But this is rather a slender foundation on which to rear so considerable a superstructure. The English peasant in his movements is certainly not a model of grace. We have no "gay grandsires skilled in gestic lore," it is true; but we very much doubt whether the gait of the agricultural labourer is the result of servility or timidity. But, to let that pass, what does this cry of independence really come to? To begin with, the

peasant-proprietor in England, if not under the thumb of a landlord, would be under the thumb of a mortgagee, and not a bit more independent really than the ordinary labourer. Supposing the worst to be true that is said of the country gentleman, the peasant would only have exchanged one kind of coercion for another: the pressure of the squire for the pressure of the lawyer; the influence of a neighbour for the influence of a stranger; and, in our opinion, he would find the little finger of the latter heavier than the loins of the former. In the second place, the cry involves nothing less than this: that, as all service is detrimental to independence, all service ought to be abolished; for agricultural service is no worse than any other. But service is one of the conditions of modern society which nobody proposes to abolish; and why therefore supersede it in favour of a particular class, at the cost of deranging our whole agricultural system and diminishing "the food of the people"? We are strongly in favour of a certain number of small farms being reserved on every extensive estate, for the occupation of deserving labourers who have succeeded in life by means of the same virtues as are needful to success in every other sphere. But this is a very different thing from "cutting England into ribbons" to be distributed among the peasantry at large.

LANDLORDS AND ALLOTMENTS.¹

March 19, 1886.

This is the title of a book, very opportunely published, by the Earl of Onslow, with the assistance on the more purely legal parts of the subject of Mr. Hall Hall, of Lincoln's Inn. The object of it is to show not only what has already been done by the landlords of England and Wales, but also what they are prepared to do towards the provision of allotment grounds for the peasantry, and to disprove that necessity for compulsory legislation which the Radicals insist upon. The present volume is only an instalment of the full and complete treatise which we are shortly to expect; but it contains so much important matter that a short summary of the principal

¹ "Landlords and Allotments: the History and Present Condition of the Allotment System." By the Earl of Onslow. And a Treatise on the Law relating to Allotments of Land, etc., etc. By T. Hall Hall, M.A., of Lincoln's Inn, Barrister-at-Law. (London: Longmans & Co. 1886.)

points brought out in it will be welcome, we are sure, to all who take an interest in the subject.

Lord Onslow has begun by collecting information from all landlords with whom he was personally acquainted; but he limited himself to the owners of estates of not less than 3,000 acres, and the results of his inquiry do not include any of the allotments which are let by clergymen or farmers. We therefore find in his pages only a small proportion of what has really been done in this direction during the present century. But even within these narrow limits are counted no fewer than 248 owners of large estates, situated in all quarters of the kingdom, who have either long ago provided allotments for the labourers, or are ready to do so if required; and as there is no reason to suppose that the particular friends of Lord Onslow are either more or less in favour of the system than landlords in general, we may fairly conclude that the great majority of landowners have acted in the same manner.

But what is perhaps still more interesting at the present moment is the conclusive evidence to be found in this volume of the unwillingness of labourers in many cases to accept allotments when offered to them at the ordinary rent of the district. No fewer than twenty-two proprietors state that in their own neighbourhoods the supply exceeds the demand. And these reports come from the following counties:—Sussex, Shropshire, Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Norfolk, Northamptonshire, Herefordshire, Kent, Leicestershire, Yorkshire, Berkshire, and Wiltshire. In the second place, we have here abundant proof that the labourers rather shrink from "small holdings, and greatly prefer allotments which they can cultivate without losing their wages. Lord Dormer, in particular, whose estates lie in Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire, states that "two or three of the allotment-holders applied for each vacant one till they made up to seven or eight acres. Result was heavy loss when bad times came; discouragement to occupy more than one allotment. Three or four labourers have had holdings of from three to four acres each. When young and active they lived very hard lives, and when old sank into extreme poverty." Mr. Parker Jervis says of the labourers in Staffordshire and Warwickshire, that they "do not care to have large allotments;" and Lady Brooke, writing of Essex, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Cambridge-

shire, and Middlesex, says that the labourers in these counties would not take more than from an eighth to a quarter of an acre. The fact is they all know that holders of three, four, and five acres, unless under very exceptional circumstances, are sure to go the way of Lord Dormer's small occupiers; they prefer regular wages and no risk. The reader may see, too, from the tables given by Lord Onslow, what is the rent which is usually asked for allotments. Of the 248 returns, about 70 give the rent of allotments as rather higher than the ordinary farms; but this is only to cover the various expenses, including rates and taxes, which fall upon the landlord. In 19 cases the rents are much lower than the ordinary agricultural rent, and in the remaining 157 cases they are exactly the same.

There is an excellent chapter on voluntary *versus* compulsory allotments, in which we are reminded of Mr. Goschen's speech of last January, objecting to Mr. Collings' Bill because it would undermine the sense of duty on the landlord's part. But that is just what the Radicals desire. Mr. Everett, whose remarks we quoted in our columns the other day, says that the object of Mr. Collings¹ and his confederates is to destroy property in land. Doubtless this is the object of a great many of them; but there are more far-sighted ones, who see that the surest way of attaining the great object of their ambition is to destroy the whole moral influence of the landlords—an influence depending on the discharge of local duties and the exercise of administrative functions, the abolition of which is the most certain means of destroying their hold upon the people. Mr. Gladstone himself has told us how admirably those duties are discharged. And Lord Onslow's little book will show that for nearly the last hundred years they have been promoting a system which Mr. Collings and others describe as a novel experiment, if not, indeed, as quite a new discovery.

SMALL HOLDINGS.

August 16, 1886.

The first general meeting of the shareholders of "The Small Farm and Labourers' Land Company" was held last week at the Westminster Palace Hotel. The company has only been in

¹ I must apologise to Mr. Collings for a statement which I do not suppose was ever true of himself in particular.

existence one year, and the Report presented by the directors deals only with the estate at Lambourne, in Berkshire, which was presented to the company by Lord Wantage, though accepted on the understanding that it will be paid for if the company succeeds. More than half the estate, which was not suitable for the company's purposes, has been sold, and the remaining portion is now valued at a sum equal to that which Lord Wantage gave for the whole. This sum, however, amounting to £4,110, is placed to the company's liabilities and credited to their "reserve fund." The net profit on the working of the estate between May, 1885, and June, 1886, is £774 17s. ; and it is out of this that the dividend of 5 per cent. advised by the directors will be paid. The shareholders' capital consists of 100,000 shares of £1 each, and of this amount £5,722 is paid up. So far, therefore, the experiment has been conducted on sound business principles, and no attempt has been made to throw dust in the eyes of the public by paying dividend out of capital. The balance-sheet represents what it is possible for a landowner to do who devotes his own land to this purpose. If the land had previously to be bought, and especially if bought upon compulsion, the result very often would be different.

The estate now in the hands of the company is a little under 200 acres. The soil, on the whole, appears to be of average quality, not fit for wheat, but growing excellent crops of oats, barley, and potatoes. It is not suitable for steam operations, as the land is too hilly and the water supply is insufficient. If farmed in the ordinary manner it would require about ten horses ; but as a good deal is cultivated by the spade, some saving is effected in that respect. It is now let out in farms ranging in size from thirteen to thirty-five acres, at an average rental of 28s. an acre ; the tenants having the option of purchase. Only one farm, however, has as yet been sold, and of this particular purchaser Lord Wantage gave an interesting account. He is a man who came from the north of England, where he seems to have saved money as an agricultural labourer. He has got seventeen acres, and is able to pay a good rent and redeem his land gradually at the same time. He has built his own house at a cost of £75, a cow-house and a shed besides, and has fenced in his little property, which now bears four acres of good barley and four of oats ; there being grass enough for a dairy and a stock of poultry, which bring him in £1 a week.

He will sell his corn for £50 or £60, and in his spare time he works on the road for 12s. a week. It is necessary to point out, however, that this said "spare time" cannot be a great deal; and that the care of seventeen acres of land, even when half of it is grass, is quite incompatible with regular farm-work and the receipt of regular wages as an agricultural labourer. Even, however, without this addition to his income he would be comfortably off; and we have never had any doubt at all that small holdings which one man can cultivate for himself without the expense of a horse, if required in a legitimate manner, *would* answer. Here, we see, is a man who has been sufficiently thrifty and skilful to save money for himself, thereby giving evidence of the possession of those qualities which enable a man to succeed in life wherever he is placed, and would certainly enable any English peasant to make a good living on a small farm. These are the men for whom such holdings should be reserved. But this is a vastly different thing from placing land acquired with borrowed money at the disposal of the agricultural labourers indiscriminately, and proposing that when they cannot pay the rent it should be made good out of the rates. It is just because the voluntary system must necessarily be regulated by this distinction that it is so infinitely preferable to the compulsory system. The peasant who acquires a farm by means of his own savings, amassed by years of industry and self-denial, acquires it by a natural and self-acting law, which is almost a guarantee for his prosperity, and must always be at the bottom of all healthy and permanent prosperity. To try to force by legislation what can only be really lasting and beneficial if allowed to grow naturally and spontaneously, is a mistake characteristic of the age we live in, but a most deep and disastrous one for all that.

The directors desire, very properly, to set the brighter side of their undertaking before the public; and it is clear that as far as it has gone it promises to be a genuine success. But two or three points still remain to be considered before we can accept the evidence even of the Lambourne Estate as conclusive proof of the policy of introducing the system of small holdings on a large scale. We may take it for granted that none of the Lambourne tenants continue to work as *bonâ fide* agricultural labourers. They may, of course, be occasional labourers, and eke out the profits of their land by a few weeks'

wages in the year. But no more. What, however, we should like to know is this : namely, how many of them are farmers, and nothing else ; and whether we should not find on inquiry that the majority of them combined some other calling with agriculture. The village carrier, the butcher, the publican, can always do well with fifteen or twenty acres of land. It is the man who trusts to his twenty acres, and his twenty acres alone, by whose success the experiment must be judged. It is being tried, we think, at Lambourne under fair conditions, where arable and pasture land are mixed together in about equal proportions, and where no great town is sufficiently near at hand to enable the farmer to be a market-gardener. When either this is the case, or so much of the land is grass that all farms are virtually dairy-farms, the conditions are exceptional ; and it is impossible to argue from the results so obtained to the probable results of the same system in all parts of England. If these small farmers, being small farmers and nothing else, are found to thrive at Lambourne for one or two generations, the event will go far to establish the soundness of the principle in general. But this brings us to the second consideration which it is necessary to take into account before making up our minds upon the subject ; and this is that it is far too soon as yet to pronounce on the working of the Lambourne system. The first occupiers of the new farms are almost sure to be men of exceptional qualifications, who have brought some capital to the business and have spent it on improving the land. We must wait a little while to see how long this can be kept up, and how far the tenant's profits will enable him to renew the fertility of the soil when the effect of his first outlay shall begin to be exhausted. We must not be satisfied with the success of two or three individuals. We must wait to see how the land prospers. No one can have studied the Report of the Commissioners for Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture (1867-70) without being struck with the overwhelming amount of evidence which it contains against the working of *la petite culture*—evidence derived from the condition of those districts where it has long prevailed and has had time to develop all the seeds of good and evil which it contains. We do not mean to say that even this evidence is conclusive ; but it cannot be set aside in deference to a few experiments in which all is *couleur de rose* at the commence-

ment, but which have still to run the risks of bad seasons, falling prices, and a gradually impoverished soil, all combining to weigh down to the ground the small cultivator whose little capital has long since been exhausted, and who has nothing but his profits to depend upon.

All honour to the liberality and generosity of those land-owners who are resolved to give the experiment a fair chance ; for if it succeeds, the blessings they will have conferred, not only on the labourers but on all classes connected with the land and rural society in general, cannot be over-estimated. To restore the old cheerfulness, loyalty, and contentment of the English peasantry, wherever these qualities have been temporarily obscured, is, in fact, to solve one of the great political problems of the present day, and to reconcile democracy with the permanence of existing institutions. We most earnestly hope that all the efforts which have been made in this direction will meet with the success which they deserve. But, unfortunately, there are still two sides to the picture ; and unless we look firmly upon the dark side as well as the light, we run the risk not only of disappointing ourselves, but all whom we have led to believe in the practicability of a scheme which does not bear the test of experience. We have to remember, however, that even a partial failure, which we trust may not occur, does not necessarily mean a universal failure ; and that the small-holding system may succeed admirably in some districts, though it is not suitable for all. In conclusion, we will merely point out that this is totally distinct from the allotment system, which stands upon its own merits, and is liable to none of the difficulties attaching to the general adoption of the process now on trial in Berkshire.

THE LAW OF ALLOTMENTS.¹

September, 1886.

This is a work that has been long wanted. It brings together within a portable compass not only the whole law upon the subject of allotments embodied in the various Acts of Parliament which have been enacted from the reign of Elizabeth down to

¹ "The Law of Allotments ; Being a Treatise on the Law relating to the Allotment of Land for the Labouring Poor. With the Statutes and Notes and a Collection of Forms and Precedents." By T. Hall Hall, M.A. (London : Longmans, Green, and Co. 1886.)

the present time, and which are all printed in full ; but also a complete list of all other Acts of Parliament, Bills, reports, and papers which bear directly or indirectly on the question. It is intended, says the author, as "a handbook for landlords, glebe-owners, parish officers, allotment wardens, trustees of charities, and others who let allotments, as well as for their tenants and advisers ;" and was originally meant to form part of Lord Onslow's work upon allotments. It was found, however, that the two together would make too bulky a volume, so that it has been necessary to publish them separately.

The interest of such a work for the public at large lies not in those legal details which must be mastered by all lessors and managers of allotments, so much as in the general principles to which the author calls attention, and in those elementary questions connected with the whole system which everyone must be presumed capable of understanding who has given any serious thought to it. In the first place, then, what is an "allotment" ? It may mean, of course, any piece of land allotted to anybody ; and technically, says Mr. Hall, it applies only to pieces of land appropriated under an enclosure award ; but he uses it throughout in its popular sense, namely, "as a small piece of land let to a person to be cultivated by him as an aid to his sustenance, but not in substitution for his labour for wages." The allotment proper is such a plot of ground as the agricultural labourer can cultivate at his spare moments, with such help as his own family may be able to afford him, and in no way trenching on the Saturday night's wages. "When the land," says Mr. Hall, "is large enough to become the main object of the tenant's labour, it is, in the phrase of the day, called a small holding rather than an allotment." It is important, he adds, to distinguish the two things, "as their political and social import differ widely, though in point of law there is not much difference." He also reminds us of another distinction which it is perhaps equally necessary to bear in mind ; and that is, that an allotment is a piece of land detached from the labourer's cottage, and that when it is close to it, it is a cottage-garden. The latter, he says truly, is usually considered a much better thing for the tenant ; and the allotment is only a substitute for it. There is, however, another term in use which is perhaps the best description of an allotment, as something which is neither a cottage-garden nor a small holding, and that is "field-

garden," which exactly expresses what an allotment is intended to be—namely, a small plot to be cultivated as a garden, but lying in the fields at a little distance from the village. When people talk of the necessity of having allotments close to the labourer's cottage they are confounding two different things—an allotment and a cottage-garden. In the Enclosure Acts what we call an allotment is always, if we understand Mr. Hall, called a field-garden.

With regard to the size of allotments, the different opinions which exist are due solely to the different agricultural conditions which prevail in different parts of the country; but on an average it will be found that half an acre is quite large enough. Evidence to this effect may be found in the Report of the Commission for Inquiry into the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture, which is mentioned by Mr. Hall as a storehouse of valuable information, and also in the Report of the Poor Law Commissioners of 1834. Both of these reports embrace the whole of England and Wales, and are free from the slightest suspicion of bias one way or the other. Mr. Hall would have done well to quote the concluding paragraph of this part of their Report: "Since it appears that land may be let to labourers on profitable terms, the necessity for any public inquiry on these points seems to be at an end. A practice which is beneficial to both parties, and is known to be so, may be left to the care of their own self-interest. The evidence shows that it is rapidly extending; and we have no doubt that as its utility is perceived it will spread still more rapidly, and that experience will show, if it has not already shown, on what mutual stipulations it can best be effected." Experience has abundantly fulfilled this prophecy.

With regard to the comparative advantages of the voluntary and compulsory systems, Mr. Hall himself speaks strongly:—

The allotments let voluntarily by private landowners are probably twenty times as numerous as those let under special Acts of Parliament. Moreover, the voluntary system is capable of indefinite expansion in the mode most calculated to suit local convenience; while a statutory system must always be cramped in practice by the ponderous machinery and restrictive provisions required to fit it for general use, even if its success be not altogether marred by the characteristic apathy of the public bodies which have to work it without feeling the personal interest of a landlord in the welfare of his tenants, and it may be without that willing assent and co-operation which alone give vigour to the law.

On the subject of the relations which ought to exist between the tenants of allotments and their landlords some diversity of opinion, though only what might have been expected, showed itself in the debates on the Agricultural Holdings Act of 1883. The Act of 1875 contained a clause which excluded allotments from the operation of it, and a similar clause was originally contained in the Bill of 1883. It was struck out, however, after a smart struggle ; and the tenant of an allotment now stands on precisely the same footing as the tenant of 500 acres.¹ On some grounds this is certainly to be regretted. For one advantage of the allotment system is the opportunity which it affords to the landowners in every parish of rewarding good conduct and discouraging bad. And the knowledge that he is liable to lose his allotment for drunkenness, dishonesty, or systematic misconduct supplies a powerful motive for the agricultural labourer to take heed unto his ways. But if the landlord, before he can turn him out, is to be worried by all the complicated provisions of the Agricultural Holdings Act, nine men out of ten will leave the tenant to his own devices : and thus the good moral influence of the system is entirely destroyed. Mr. Hall, however, is of opinion that an allotment,² when devoted to the cultivation of vegetables and fruit only for the labourer's own use (even though some might be occasionally sold), and not sown with corn or turned into a regular market-garden, is exempt from the operation of the Act. Such, no doubt, was the original intention with which allotments were introduced ; but corn is now so generally grown upon them that the prohibition of it would be regarded as a hardship. The meal keeps the pig, and the pig pays the rent ; and a garden in which he could not grow his bit of barley would lose more than half its value in the eyes of any ordinary labourer. But we have always thought it a great mistake to place allotments on the same footing as farms, and, from what he says at page 71, Mr. Hall seems to think so too.

¹ This is a doubtful point.

² The proper designation of an allotment is a field-garden, as distinct from a cottage-garden.

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